
Red Riding Hood
Part 2
By Ferres

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THE EDITOR

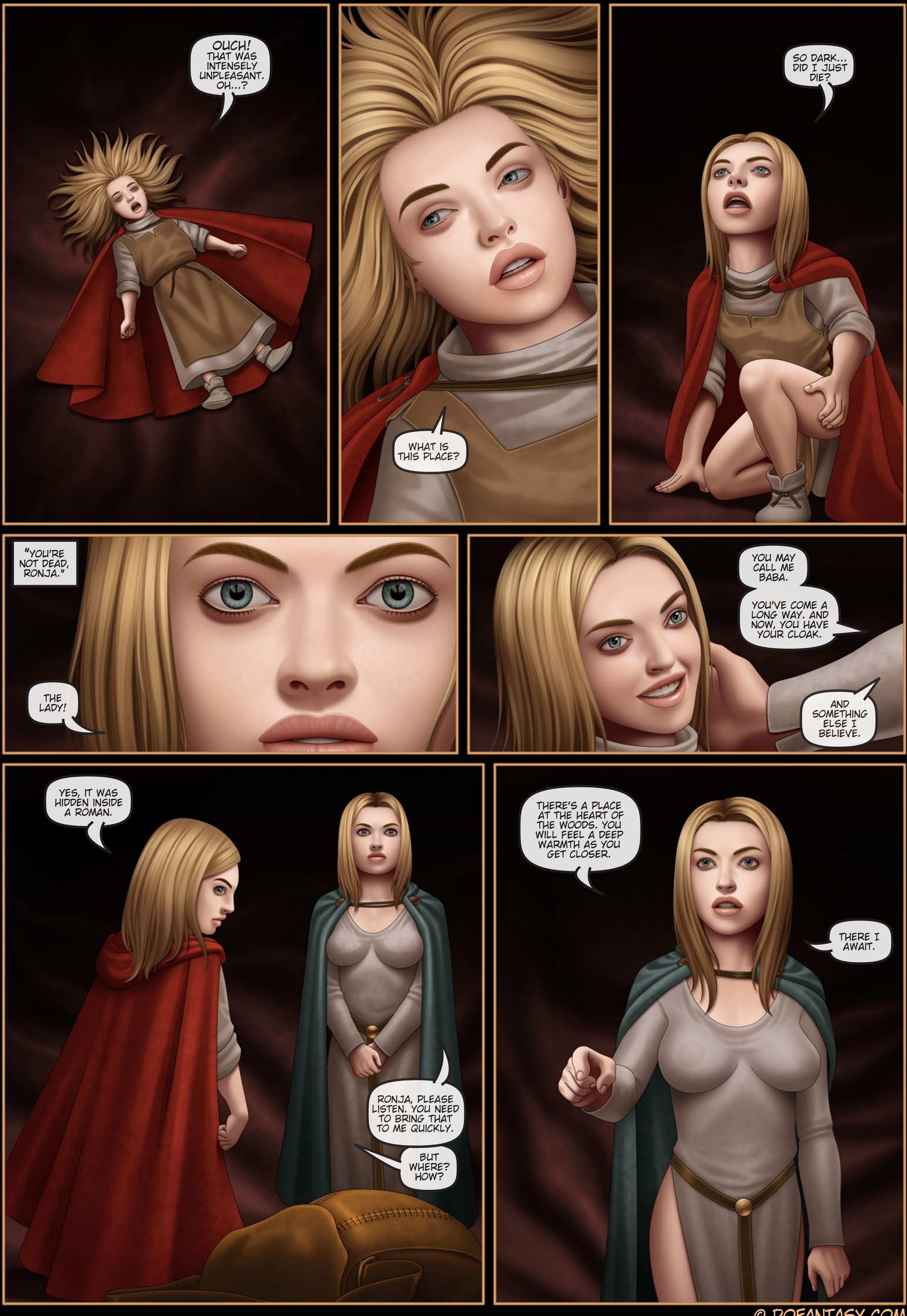
Red Riding Hood

PART 2

BY FERRES

In Memory of Nuria.


HNNNH!
UNGH!
AAAH!!!

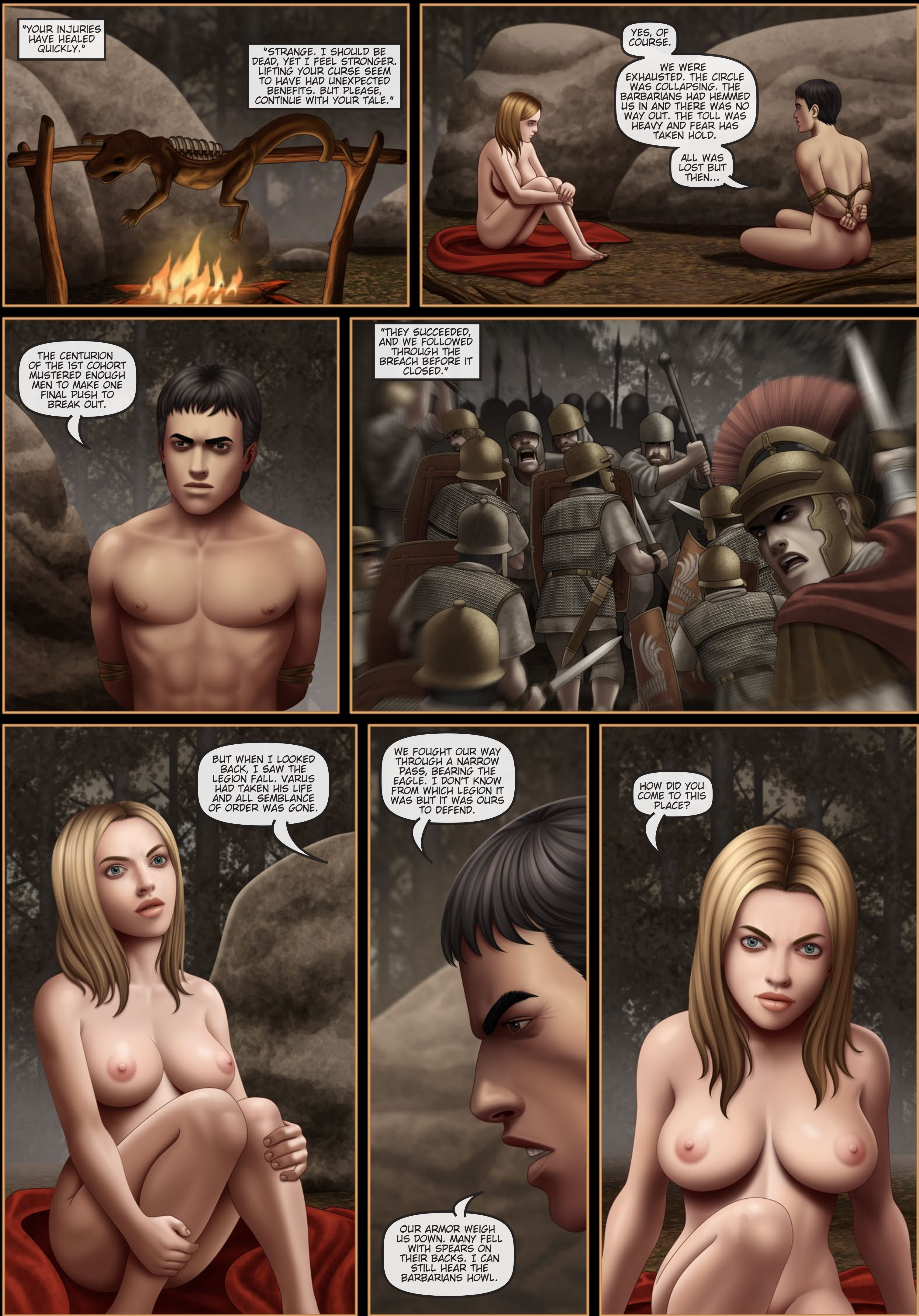

OUCH! THAT WAS INTENSELY UNPLEASANT. OH...?
WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
SO DARK... DID I JUST DIE?
"YOU'RE NOT DEAD, RONJA."
THE LADY!
YOU MAY CALL ME BABA.
YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY. AND NOW, YOU HAVE YOUR CLOAK.
AND SOMETHING ELSE I BELIEVE.
YES, IT WAS HIDDEN INSIDE A ROMAN.
RONJA, PLEASE LISTEN. YOU NEED TO BRING THAT TO ME QUICKLY.
BUT WHERE? HOW?
THERE'S A PLACE AT THE HEART OF THE WOODS. YOU WILL FEEL A DEEP WARMTH AS YOU GET CLOSER.
THERE I AWAIT.



DO I HAVE ANY OTHER CHOICE? I'D RATHER BE FAR AWAY FROM HERE.
"THAT WOULD NOT BE WISE."
ENOUGH WITH YOUR GAMES, ARCHER. YOU CAN NOT HARM ME.
THE ARCHER?!
DO NOT INTERFERE. THIS MATTER IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN.
THIS IS MY CONCERN. YOU HAVE TRIFLED WITH POWERS WELL BEYOND YOUR COMPREHENSION.
YOU'VE DOOMED US WITH YOUR BLOODY INCANTATIONS, NOW YOU BRING HER INTO THIS.
NO! HELP ME!
"IT'S YOUR MEDDLING THAT DOOMED US, ARCHER."
I CAN'T BREATHE.


MNNNFF!
UNNGFF!
SHRAK!
AGH!
UNGH! UH...UH!
BABA! BABA...?
?!
YOU! AWAKE!


WHO... WHO ARE YOU?!
WHAT ARE YOU?
ANNAEUS... ANNAEUS LONGINUS.
WERE YOU THE CREATURE THAT ATTACKED ME?
I WAS UNDER A DARK, EVIL SPELL. I COULDN'T THINK. MY MIND WAS CLOUDED WITH RAGE. BUT YES, IT WAS I.
I HAVE WRONGED YOU. THERE IS NO FORGIVENESS. TAKE YOUR RIGHTFUL VENGEANCE.
BUT I MUST THANK YOU FOR LIFTING MY CURSE. FOR NOW, I CAN DIE A MAN AND NOT... NOT A BEAST... NOT A MONSTER.
I'LL THINK ON THIS FOR A WHILE.

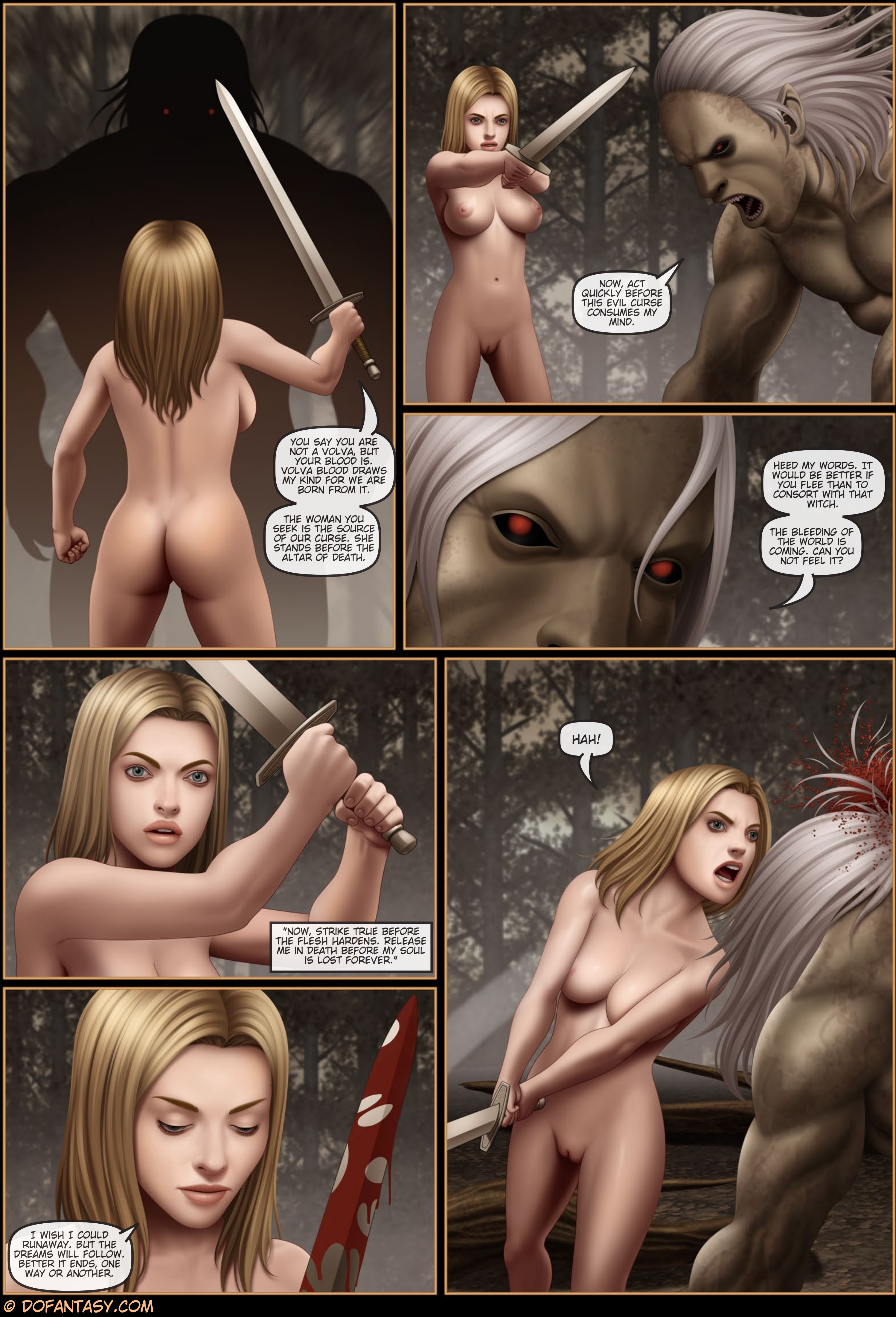

"YOUR INJURIES HAVE HEALED QUICKLY."
"STRANGE. I SHOULD BE DEAD, YET I FEEL STRONGER. LIFTING YOUR CURSE SEEM TO HAVE HAD UNEXPECTED BENEFITS. BUT PLEASE, CONTINUE WITH YOUR TALE."
YES, OF COURSE.
WE WERE EXHAUSTED. THE CIRCLE WAS COLLAPSING. THE BARBARIANS HAD HEMMED US IN AND THERE WAS NO WAY OUT. THE TOLL WAS HEAVY AND FEAR HAS TAKEN HOLD.
ALL WAS LOST BUT THEN...
THE CENTURION OF THE 1ST COHORT MUSTERED ENOUGH MEN TO MAKE ONE FINAL PUSH TO BREAK OUT.
"THEY SUCCEEDED, AND WE FOLLOWED THROUGH THE BREACH BEFORE IT CLOSED."
BUT WHEN I LOOKED BACK, I SAW THE LEGION FALL. VARUS HAD TAKEN HIS LIFE AND ALL SEMBLANCE OF ORDER WAS GONE.
WE FOUGHT OUR WAY THROUGH A NARROW PASS, BEARING THE EAGLE. I DON'T KNOW FROM WHICH LEGION IT WAS BUT IT WAS OURS TO DEFEND.
OUR ARMOR WEIGH US DOWN. MANY FELL WITH SPEARS ON THEIR BACKS. I CAN STILL HEAR THE BARBARIANS HOWL.
HOW DID YOU COME TO THIS PLACE?


"IN ALL HONESTY, I DO NOT KNOW. WE JUST RAN. ANY DIRECTION WOULD DO, AS LONG AS IT WAS AWAY FROM THE FIGHTING."
WHEN THE BARBARIANS DREW CLOSE, A FEW WOULD VOLUNTEER TO SLOW THEM DOWN.
I WAS ONE.
YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE COME HERE. THESE ARE NOT YOUR LANDS.
I'M A LEGIONARY OF ROME, 5TH COHORT OF THE 18TH. WE GO WHERE WE ARE TOLD.
...AND DIE THERE AS WELL, APPARENTLY
"YES, BUT IN MY CASE, SIMPLE DEATH WAS A FAR SWEETER OPTION THAN WHAT CAME NEXT."
"I TOOK A SPEAR THROUGH THE LEG."
"THEY WERE UPON ME. THEN IT ALL WENT BLACK."


I WAS A PRISONER, BUT I TOOK COMFORT KNOWING THAT THEY DIDN'T HAVE THE EAGLE. I WAS SO NAIVE.
THEY BROUGHT ME TO A SACRIFICIAL ALTAR WHERE A WOMAN STOOD, DRENCHED IN BLOOD. ROMAN BLOOD.
WHAT FOLLOWED WAS SOMETHING BEYOND THE DARKEST OF NIGHTMARES. SHE...
WHAT WOMAN! WAS SHE ALONE?
BLOOD, SO MUCH BLOOD AND THAT THING! SHE... IT WAS... I CAN'T.
WERE THERE OTHER WOMEN? TELL ME!
I WILL SPEAK OF IT NO MORE. I WILL NOT BURDEN YOU WITH THE VISIONS I'VE SEEN.
BASTARD! UNGH!
THAT EVIL DWARF!
WHAT'S WRONG? ARE YOU IN SOME KIND OF SPELL?
OUNH! HIS POTION STILL HAS A HOLD. I NEED TO... I NEED TO...
ACK?!
RIGHTFUL VENGEANCE... YES, I'LL HAVE IT NOW!


I'M USUALLY NOT THIS FORWARD, BUT I DESPERATELY NEED RELIEF.
GET HARD FOR ME!
NO, THIS IS NOT...
AGH!
ALRIGHT, THIS TRICK I LEARNED FROM MY MISTRESS.
THERE WE GO.
THE DWARF'S WAS BIGGER, BUT YOURS WILL DO.
OUNH!
NO STOP!
ANH!


MMNNFF!
HNNNH!
AAGH!
UMMH... THAT FEELS GOOD. OH, LIKE YOUR STILL GROWING INSIDE OF ME.
LET'S TRY...
HRRRR! GET OFF!
YOU DID NOT LIFT MY CURSE. YOU ONLY CONTAINED IT FOR A MOMENT. IT CAN ONLY BE LIFTED FROM THE SOURCE.
"I TELL YOU NOW, YOU WILL NOT SURVIVE ME IF YOU ARE NOT SWIFT."


YOU SAY YOU ARE NOT A VOLVA, BUT YOUR BLOOD IS. VOLVA BLOOD DRAWS MY KIND FOR WE ARE BORN FROM IT.
THE WOMAN YOU SEEK IS THE SOURCE OF OUR CURSE. SHE STANDS BEFORE THE ALTAR OF DEATH.
NOW, ACT QUICKLY BEFORE THIS EVIL CURSE CONSUMES MY MIND.
HEED MY WORDS. IT WOULD BE BETTER IF YOU FLEE THAN TO CONSORT WITH THAT WITCH.
THE BLEEDING OF THE WORLD IS COMING. CAN YOU NOT FEEL IT?
"NOW, STRIKE TRUE BEFORE THE FLESH HARDENS. RELEASE ME IN DEATH BEFORE MY SOUL IS LOST FOREVER."
HAH!
I WISH I COULD RUNAWAY. BUT THE DREAMS WILL FOLLOW. BETTER IT ENDS, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.


MAN THE WALLS! SOMEONE'S AT THE GATE.
OPEN! OPEN THE GATE!
IT'S THE ROMAN. WOTAN, HE HAS...
OPEN THE FUCKING GATE!
"OPEN THE GATE!"
IDIOTS!
"YOU ARE AN IDIOT AND YOUR MEN ARE ALL FUCKING IDIOTS."
GATHER WOOD AND RAISE A FUNERAL PYRE. WE WILL BURN HIM.
THAT IS NOT OUR CUSTOM.
FUCK YOUR CUSTOM. DO AS I COMMAND!


SEIGFINNA! SEIGFINNA!
IT'S HIM.
AAGH!
WHERE'S THAT HELL WHORE?
YOU THERE! SHOW SOME RESPECT WHEN I'M ADDRESSING YOU.
BUGGER OFF. CAN'T YOU SEE I'M BUSY HERE?
SEIGFINNA, WHERE?!
YOU HAVE EYES. THERE IN THE CORNER.
"SHE BIT OFF A MAN'S COCK, SO WE GAVE HER THE THRONE TO REST AND CONTEMPLATE."
UNGH! WHAT DO YOU WANT? IF YOU LIKE ME TO POLISH YOUR SWORD, YOU NEED TO COME CLOSER?
I BRING SAD NEWS. BRENNUS, IS DEAD.
DEAD?


THAT LEAVES ME WITH ONE LESS PERSON TO KILL. BUT I JEST.
HEARING YOUR WORDS. KNOWING HE'S GONE. I'M AT A LOSS. I SOMEWHAT ENJOYED HIS LOVE MAKING TECHNIQUE. HE HAD POTENTIAL, FOR A BOII THAT IS.
YOU TOLD NOTHING OF THE BEASTS THAT LURK IN YOUR WOODS.
I'M NOT OBLIGED TO TELL AND YOU NEGLECTED TO ASK. WE CAN TALK ABOUT IT WHEN I GET OFF THIS... THRONE.
"NO! AH!"
YOU SHOULD, FIX SEIGFINNA'S THRONE. IT LACKS STRUCTURAL SOUNDNESS.
I'LL DO IT WHEN I'M DONE!
"YOU DON'T COMMAND ANYONE HERE."
AH!
"THE TRAITOR BURNS WELL."
I GIVE HIM THAT.


WHAT SAY YOU, VINDEX? WHAT IS THE PREVAILING MOOD AMONG THE MEN?
THEY BARELY TOLERATE YOUR PRESENCE.
RETURNING WITH THE BODY OF THEIR CHIEFTAIN BOUGHT YOU TIME, BUT NOT BY MUCH.
BURNING THE BODY LEFT THEM WITH NOTHING TO GRIEVE. YOU SHOULD LEAVE NOW.
"AND KEEP YOUR SWORD HANDY."
WHERE'S THE ROMAN!
THERE!
KILL HIM!
GUT HIM!
NO! HE DIES SLOWLY FOR DEFILING OUR CHIEFTAINS BODY!


VINDEX, MOVE ASIDE. WE'RE NOT HERE FOR YOU.
I TOOK AN OATH TO FIGHT FOR ROME. WE ALL DID.
JUST WORDS, NO MEANING... ACK!
FINISH HIM!
AAH!
WHEN THE CHIEFTAIN DIED SO DID OUR OATH TO ROME.
WE RETURN TO THE OLD WAYS.
"OLD WAYS BETTER. HONOR OUR GODS WITH ROMAN BLOOD."


AGH!
YOU'LL HAVE TO SHED MORE OF YOUR OWN BEFORE YOU TAKE A DROP OF MINE.
I'M NOT AN EASY MAN TO TAKE.
YOU WANT MY BLOOD, EARN IT
AARGH!
EH?!
WHA...?!
I SEE THE BOII PLUMB THE DEPTHS OF DISHONOR. THEY CAN'T EVEN HOLD AN OATH TO AN ALLY.
IT'S MY RIGHT TO KILL EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU.
"HOWEVER; EVEN WITH YOUR DEPLETED NUMBERS, I REALLY DON'T HAVE THE STRENGTH."
UNSHACKLE WHAT REMAINS OF MY PEOPLE AND I WILL LET YOU GO.
BUT KNOW THIS, SCORES WILL BE SETTLED. MAKE PEACE WITH YOUR GODS. BECAUSE ONE DAY, I WILL COME VISITING.
"OH, LEAVE THIS ROMAN TO ME. MY SCORE WITH HIM, I SETTLE NOW."

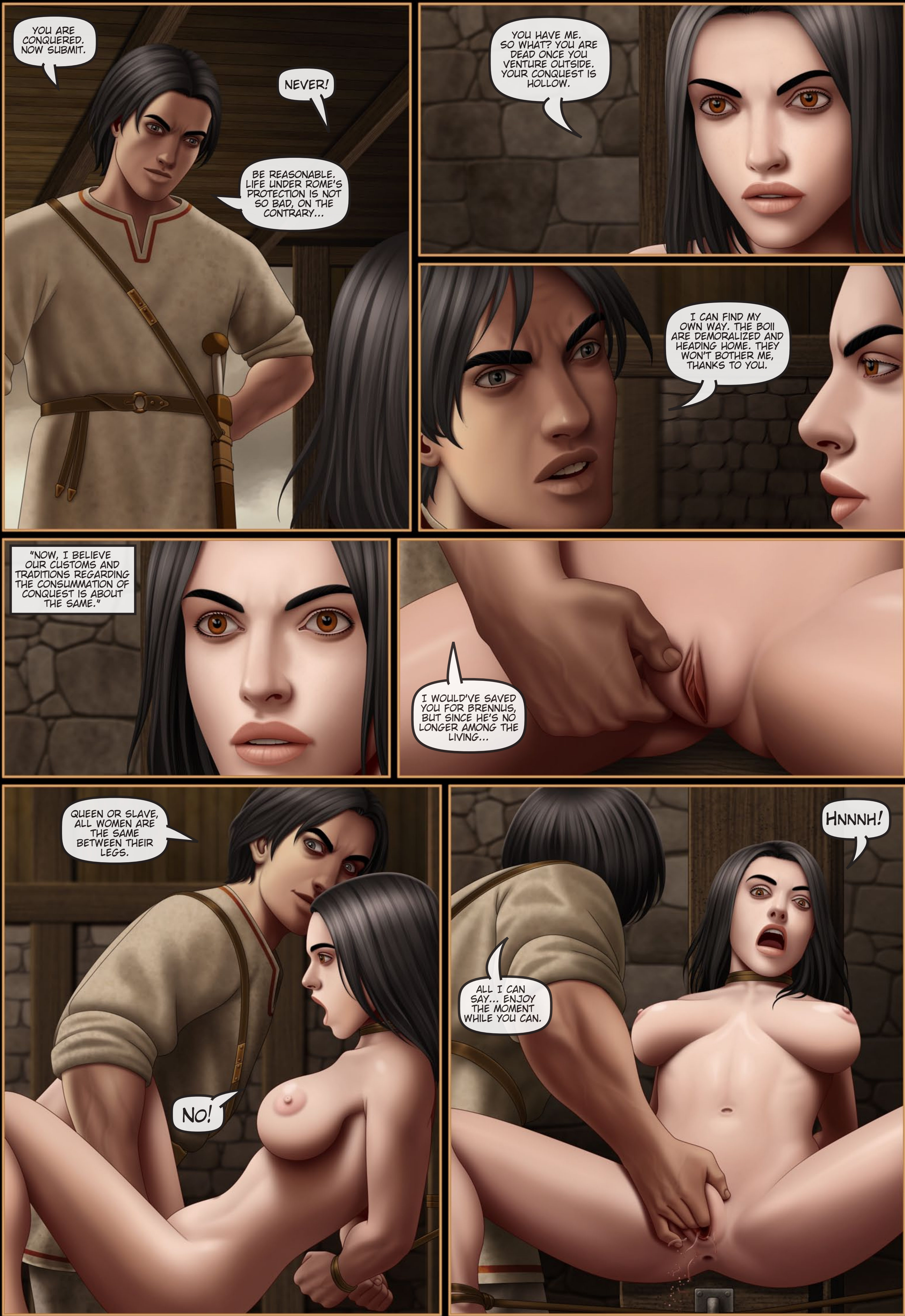

"THEY SAY YOU PUT JUDOL TO THE SWORD. JUDOL KNOWS HOW TO FIGHT ROMANS, SLAIN MANY IN BATTLE. YET HE DIES BY YOUR HAND. HOW?"
THE EMPIRE IS VAST, NO BARBARIAN CAN POSSIBLY KNOW ALL OF IT'S MARTIAL WAYS. PERHAPS HE WAS NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE EASTERN STYLE.
YOU'RE A PECULIAR ROMAN. TRAVELS WITH A DWARF, ALONE WITH A CELTIC HOST. VERY BRAVE AND VERY STUPID.
GIVEN TO CHALLENGES, CELTIC LOYALTY OFTEN WAVERS.
A LITTLE LATE, BUT GOOD TO KNOW.
PFEH! ROMAN STYLE, EASTERN STYLE. I PISS ON THEM ALL!
HAH!
ALL THAT MATTERS IS THE HAND THAT WIELDS THE SWORD.
AAGH!


ARMOR WEIGHS YOU DOWN. TIRES YOU QUICKLY.
GAH!
BEFORE YOU DIE, I WANT TO KNOW WHERE RONJA IS.
FOOD FOR THE CARRION EATERS. WHY DO YOU CARE?
SHE KILLED RUFIO, MY PERSONAL SLAVE. HE WAS LIKE A BROTHER TO ME.
YOU MEAN YOUR DWARF? THAT'S RIDICULOUS. RONJA'S USELESS WHEN DEALING WITH ANYONE SHORTER THAN HERSELF. HER FAT TITS GET IN HER WAY.
DON'T CALL HIM A DWARF!
UNGH!
I SAW HIM FOR WHAT HE WAS. A FOOLISH LITTLE DWARF.


HAH!
AAGH!
SO, THERE IS SOME VALUE TO THAT ARMOR.
IT SERVES TO DELAY YOUR INEVITABLE END. NOW, WHERE SHALL I START? THE GONADS?
HUH!
EH?



YOU RESORT TO TRICKERY?
NO!
I RESORT TO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO WIN.
BUMP!
THE ADVANTAGES OF FIGHTING NAKED IS LOST ONCE YOU CLOSE THE DISTANCE.
"WAKE UP, CIMBRII QUEEN!"
UGH?
AH! BASTARD, UNBIND ME AND I'LL SHOW YOU HOW MUCH ROMAN I CAN BLEED OUT OF YOU!
YOU'RE FAR MORE DANGEROUS THAN I IMAGINED. IF NOT FOR YOUR HUBRIS, I WOULD BE DEAD. THERE MUST BE A LITTLE BIT OF ROMAN IN YOU.


YOU ARE CONQUERED. NOW SUBMIT.
NEVER!
BE REASONABLE. LIFE UNDER ROME'S PROTECTION IS NOT SO BAD, ON THE CONTRARY...
YOU HAVE ME. SO WHAT? YOU ARE DEAD ONCE YOU VENTURE OUTSIDE. YOUR CONQUEST IS HOLLOW.
I CAN FIND MY OWN WAY. THE BOII ARE DEMORALIZED AND HEADING HOME. THEY WON'T BOTHER ME, THANKS TO YOU.
"NOW, I BELIEVE OUR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS REGARDING THE CONSUMMATION OF CONQUEST IS ABOUT THE SAME."
I WOULD'VE SAVED YOU FOR BRENNUS, BUT SINCE HE'S NO LONGER AMONG THE LIVING...
QUEEN OR SLAVE, ALL WOMEN ARE THE SAME BETWEEN THEIR LEGS.
NO!
HNNNH!
ALL I CAN SAY... ENJOY THE MOMENT WHILE YOU CAN.


THERE'S NO NEED FOR CIVILITY.
AH! WOTAN!
YOU APPEAR GENUINELY CONCERNED WITH HER FATE.
TELL ME ONE THING, ROMAN. IS RONJA TRULY DEAD? AHH!
UNGH! WELL, I CAN'T BE CERTAIN... UNH!
AAAH!!!
...BUT GIVEN THE MONSTERS THAT DWELL IN THE WOODS...
UNNH!
"IT'S MORE LIKELY THAT SHE PERISHED."
"DON'T BE TOO SURE."
"DESPITE HER SHORTCOMINGS... AH! RONJA IS RESOURCEFUL."


EH?!
YOU SHOULD'VE KEPT YOUR ARMOR ON!
ARGH! NO!
YOU'VE KILLED ME!
WHERE DO YOU THINK YOUR GOING? WE'RE NOT DONE YET.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR CIVILITY.
GHAAK!

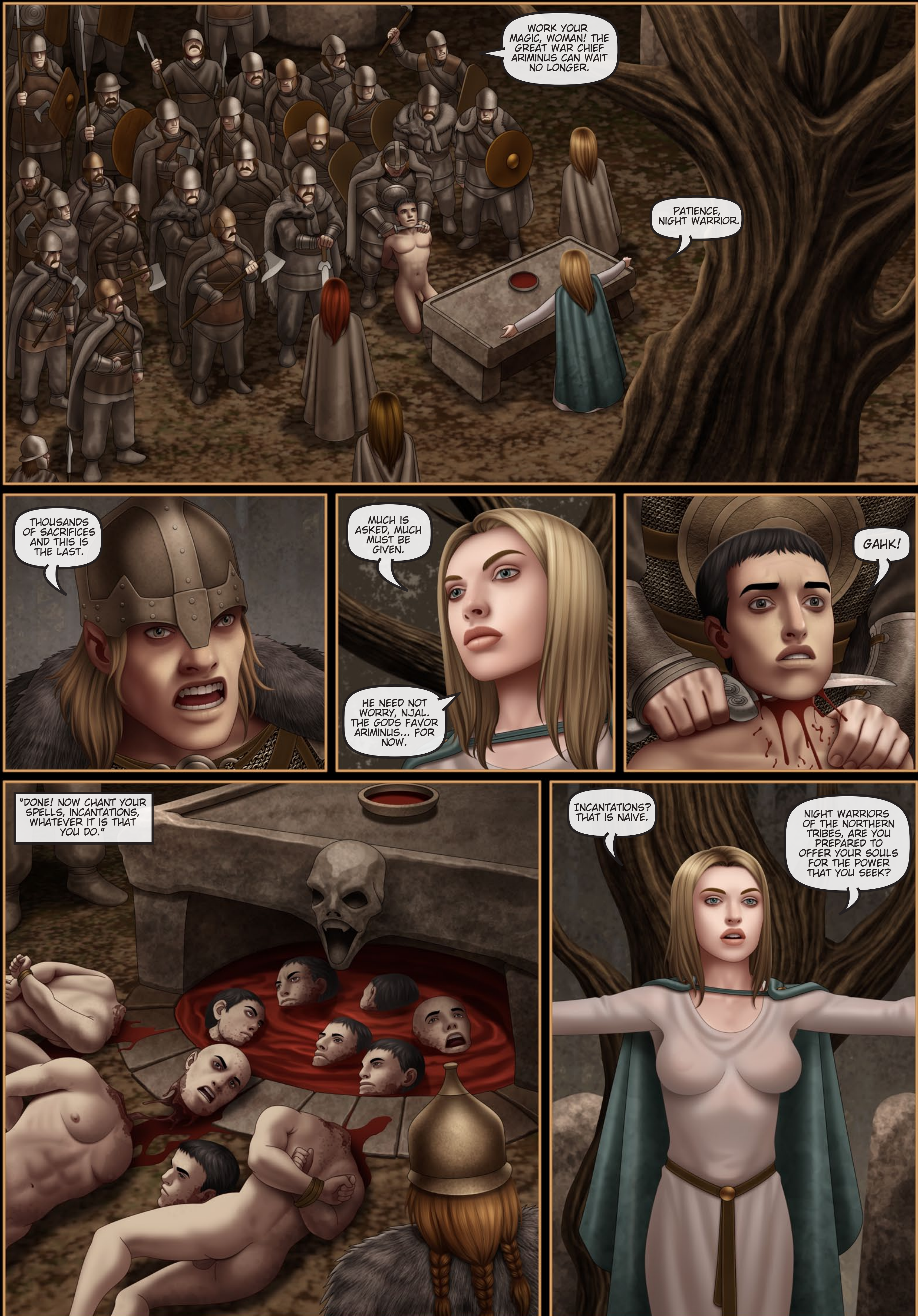

NOW WE'RE DONE.
WHAT WILL HAPPEN NOW?
QUIET YOURSELVES AND LISTEN. THE CIMBRII TRIBE IS LOST, BUT IT'S PEOPLE WILL LIVE ON. TAKE WHAT YOU CAN AND GO NORTH. COHABIT WITH THE SAXONES OR THE TEUTONES.
ALL OUR MEN ARE GONE. WE'RE DOOMED.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, MY QUEEN?
I... I...
HMMM...
WHERE IS IT? IT HAS TO BE HERE.
OR WAS IT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER? NO?
OH WAIT THERE IT IS.
EW! IT'S STILL MOVING?


ACCURSED PHALLUS, IT THROBS STILL. IT'S MUCH BIGGER THAN I REMEMBERED.
THE SPEAR'S TIP IS TAINTED WITH THE BEAST'S BLOOD AND MINE.
IT COULD STILL BE USEFUL.
I GUESS IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH HOLE I PUT IT IN. IT WOULD BE EQUALLY UNPLEASANT EITHER WAY.
THIS WILL NOT BE PLEASANT. NOT PLEASANT AT ALL.
AW!
DAMN! IT WON'T GO IN.
AH! THERE IT GOES.


THIS IS TAKING TOO LONG. I'M GETTING VERY SORE.
IT'S NOT WORKING. I'LL TRY THE OTHER WAY.
WAIT, IT'S STARTING!
FUCK THIS. MY BUGGER HOLE HURTS.
ARCHER! ARCHER, WHERE ARE YOU? I NEED HELP.
GIRL WITH THE RED RIDING HOOD. ENOUGH WITH YOUR CATERWAUL. WOLVES ARE ABOUT AND THEY DON'T LIKE RED. RED IS THE EAGLE'S COLOR.
ARCHER, I NEED YOUR HELP.
YOU ARE FORTUNATE, BABA IS AT REST. SHE WON'T NOTICE YOUR PRESENCE.
I'M GOING INTO THE HEART OF THE WOODS.
I MUST SAY, I DO NOT APPROVE OF THE CHOICES YOU'RE MAKING.


IT'S NOT WHAT I WANT, BUT I FEEL THAT THIS IS THE PATH I HAVE TO TAKE. I'M ALWAYS BEING DRAWN HERE. HOW CAN I RUN FROM IT?
THIS PLACE WAS BORN OF THE SUMMONING, AN INCOMPLETE SUMMONING. THROUGH BLOOD AND DEATH SHE HAS ANCHORED YOU TO THIS PURGATORY.
EVEN IF YOU MUST SUFFER, IT IS YOUR BURDEN.
WHY DOES IT HAVE TO BE MY BURDEN? IF I GIVE THAT OBJECT TO HER, THIS WILL ALL GO AWAY?
"IF SHE COMPLETES THE SUMMONING. THEN YES."
THEN I WILL GIVE IT TO HER.
THEN I CAN NOT HELP YOU. RETURN TO THE WAKING WORLD, RONJA.
NO! I DID NOT CHOOSE THIS. BUT I WILL CHOOSE THE WAY TO END IT.
I NEED TO SEE WHAT LAYS BEFORE ME. SHOW ME THE SUMMONING. SHOW ME MY MOTHER.
SHOW ME!


BY THE GODS! HOW COULD YOU HAVE BROUGHT A WEAPON FROM THE WAKING WORLD?
BLOOD TAINTED! SO, YOU'RE STARTING TO UNDERSTAND THE SORCERY OF THE VOLVA.
I'M TIRED OF BEING TREATED LIKE A CHILD, BEING PRODDED HERE AND THERE FOR REASONS I DO NOT KNOW. SHOW ME THE SUMMONING. SHOW ME WHY I'M HERE.
YOU SHOW PERSISTENCE, GIRL WITH THE RED RIDING HOOD.
SHOW ME OR I WILL STAB YOU AGAIN!
CALM YOURSELF, GIRL.
VERY WELL, I WILL LET YOU SEE ALL. BE WARNED, WHAT IS SEEN CAN NOT BE UNSEEN.
DOWN THERE IS THE SACRIFICIAL ALTAR TO THE NAMELESS NETHER GODS. THEY WON'T NOTICE YOU BECAUSE YOU WHERE NEVER THERE. BUT AVOID CATCHING BABA'S EYE. SHE KNOWS YOU.
BEWARE. THE SUMMONING CAN TRAP YOU HERE AND YOU MAY NEVER WAKE AGAIN.

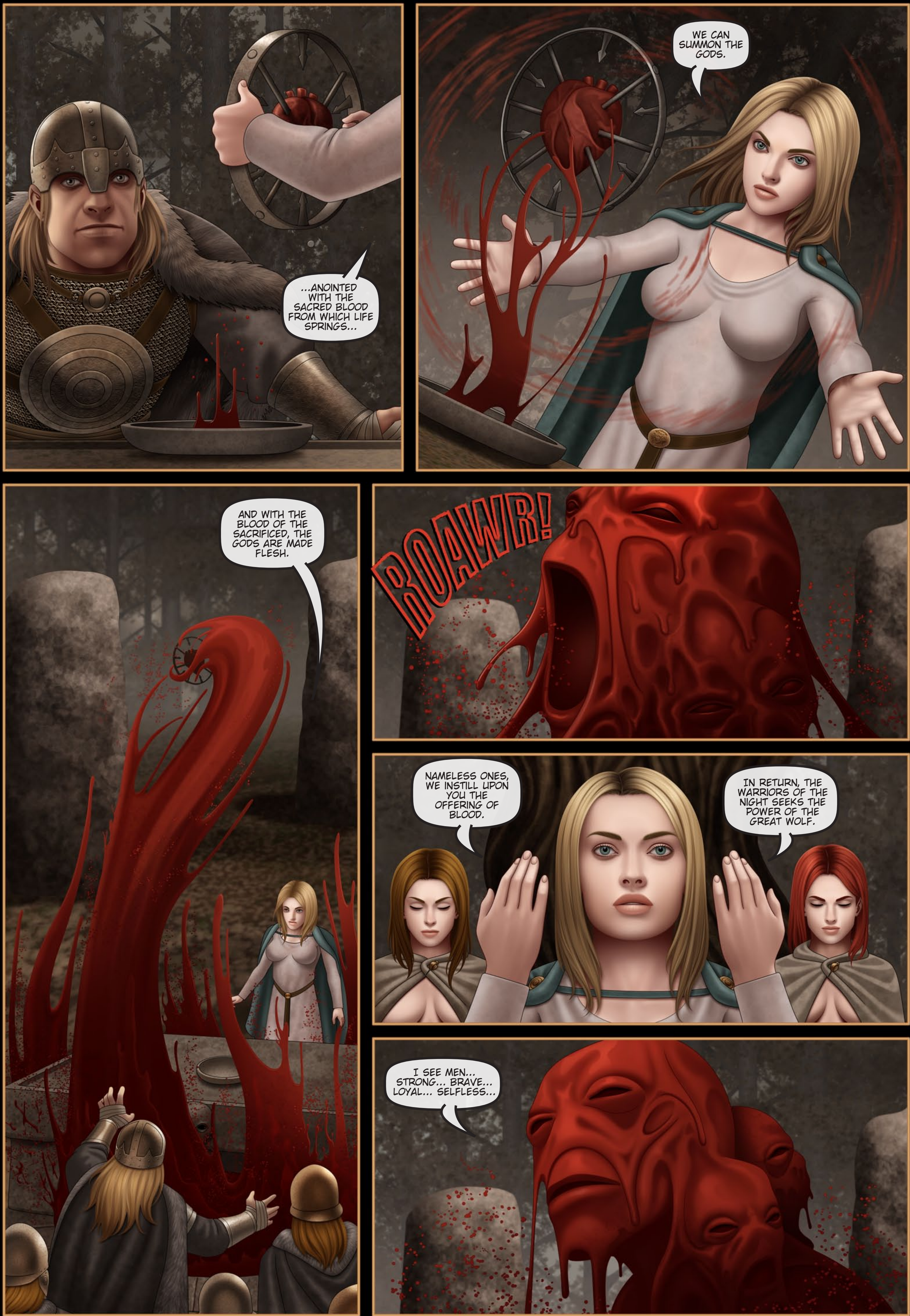


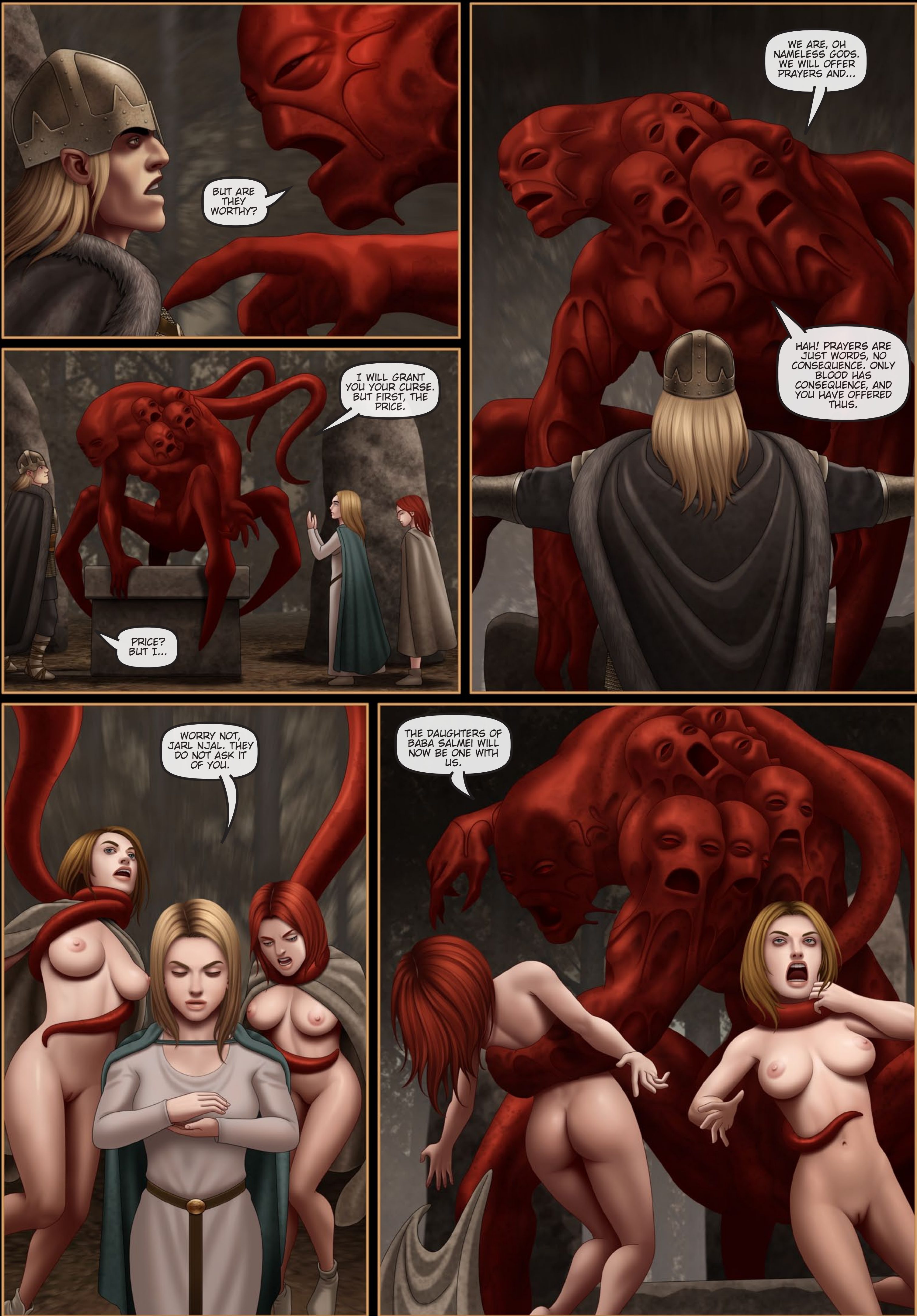
WORK YOUR MAGIC, WOMAN! THE GREAT WAR CHIEF ARIMINUS CAN WAIT NO LONGER.
PATIENCE, NIGHT WARRIOR.
THOUSANDS OF SACRIFICES AND THIS IS THE LAST.
MUCH IS ASKED, MUCH MUST BE GIVEN.
HE NEED NOT WORRY, NJAL. THE GODS FAVOR ARIMINUS... FOR NOW.
GAHK!
"DONE! NOW CHANT YOUR SPELLS, INCANTATIONS, WHATEVER IT IS THAT YOU DO."
INCANTATIONS? THAT IS NAIVE.
NIGHT WARRIORS OF THE NORTHERN TRIBES, ARE YOU PREPARED TO OFFER YOUR SOULS FOR THE POWER THAT YOU SEEK?


WAIT, WHAT?! NO ONE SAID ANYTHING ABOUT OUR SOULS.
"WE MAKE THE OFFERING OF ROMAN BLOOD. BUT OUR SOULS...?"
"...NOT TO YOUR NAMELESS GODS."
"OUR GODS MAY BE FICKLE, BUT OUR SOULS BELONG TO THEM."
BUT NIGHT WARRIOR...
AAGH!
YOUR GODS HAVE NO NEED OF SOULS...
...BECAUSE YOUR GODS DO NOT EXIST.
AAAH!!!
ENOUGH! GIVE US THE POWER OF THE GREAT WOLF!
THE ROMANS ARE SURE TO RETURN. THEY WILL BE MADE TO KNOW THAT THEIR EAGLE CAST NO SHADOW WHERE THE WOLVES REIGN.
LET ME BE CLEAR THEN. THERE ARE NO SPELLS, NO CHANTS. THIS IS NO ENCHANTMENT, THIS IS A CURSE.
A DARK AND POWERFUL BLOOD CURSE. FOR THE SAKE OF THIS POWER, ALL ELSE MUST BE FORSAKEN.



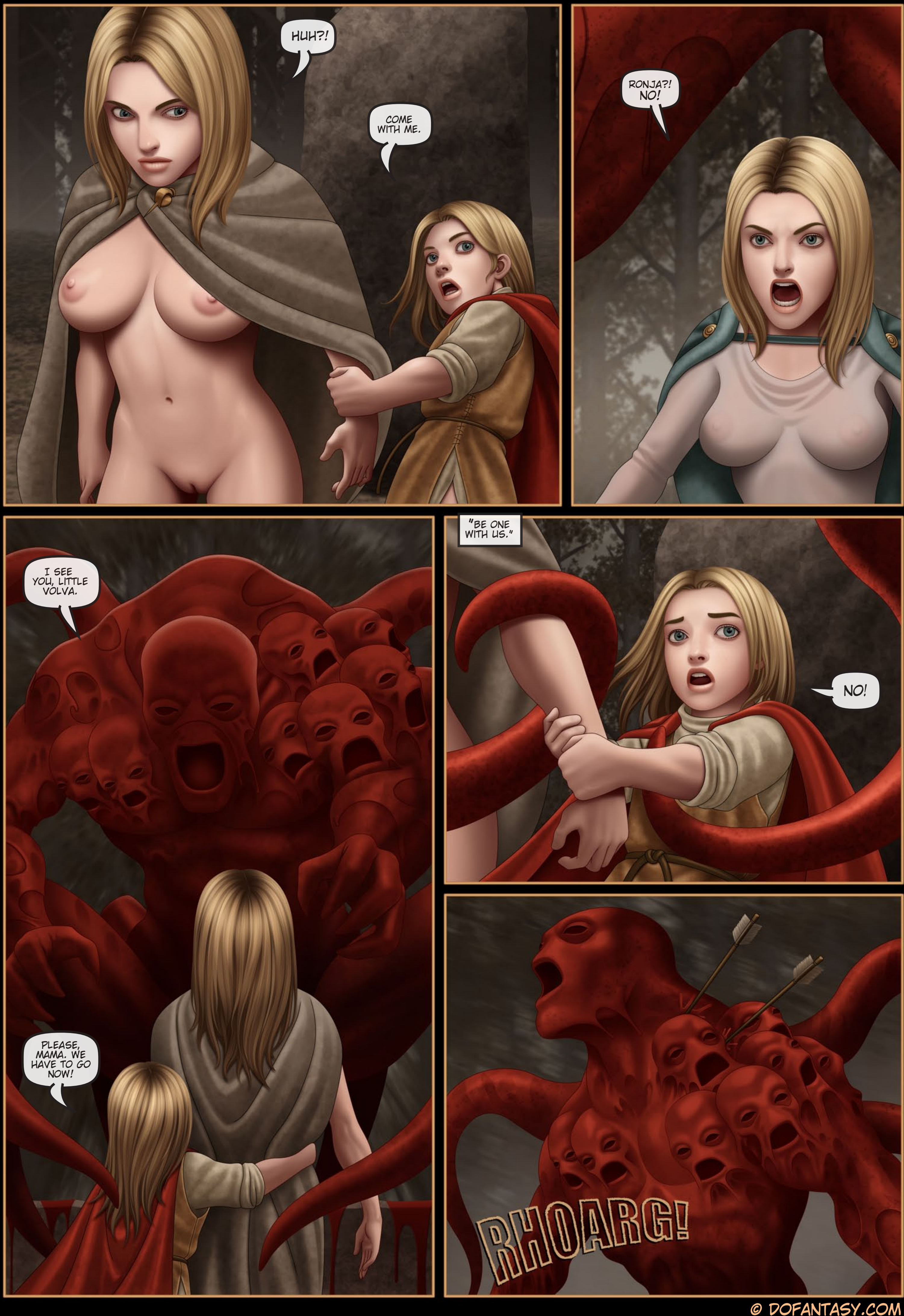
DAMN BE YOUR CURSE. I, JARL NJAL, SPEAK FOR ALL MY KINSMEN. FOR OUR KINGS, OUR WIVES, OUR CHILDREN, OUR PEOPLE, WE FORSAKE ALL.
VERY WELL.
IN THE TIME BEFORE THE WOLF, BEFORE THE CHERUSCI, THE MARSI, THE CHAUCI, EVEN THE CIMBRII.
THERE ONCE WALKED A MAN.
HE WAS THE LAST SON OF THE FIRST MEN. AND LIKE THOSE THAT CAME BEFORE HIM, HE WAS WITHOUT DEATH.
BUT IN A FIT GREAT SORROW AND LONELINESS, HE PLANTED AN UNDYING TREE.
WITHIN WHICH HE PLACED HIS DEATHLESS HEART.
EVEN THOUGH THE MAN HAD LONG SINCE PASSED, THAT HEART BEATS STILL.
WITH THIS HEART...


...ANOINTED WITH THE SACRED BLOOD FROM WHICH LIFE SPRINGS...
WE CAN SUMMON THE GODS.
AND WITH THE BLOOD OF THE SACRIFICED, THE GODS ARE MADE FLESH.
ROAWR!
NAMELESS ONES, WE INSTILL UPON YOU THE OFFERING OF BLOOD.
IN RETURN, THE WARRIORS OF THE NIGHT SEEKS THE POWER OF THE GREAT WOLF.
I SEE MEN... STRONG... BRAVE... LOYAL... SELFLESS...

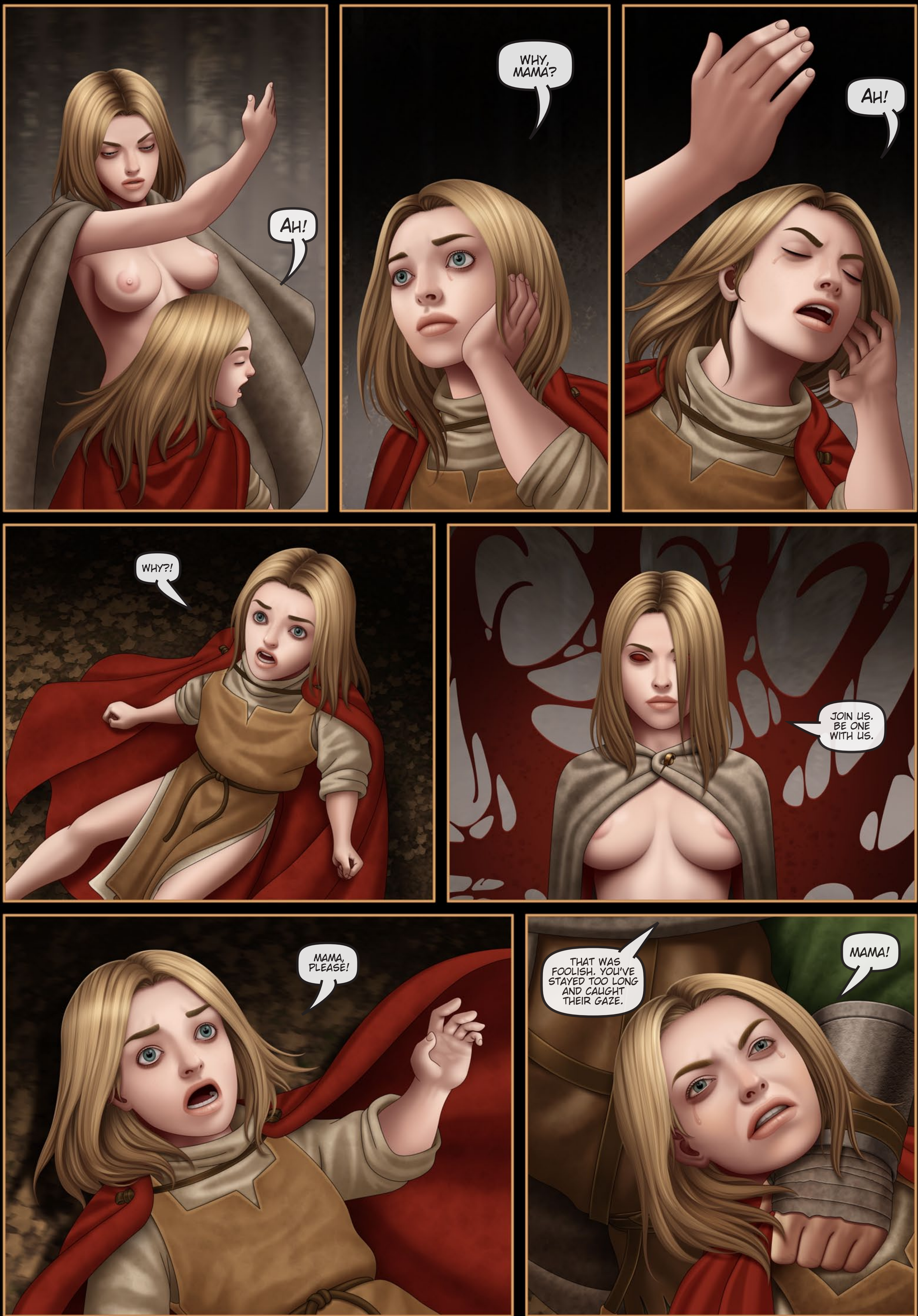


BUT ARE THEY WORTHY?
WE ARE, OH NAMELESS GODS. WE WILL OFFER PRAYERS AND...
HAH! PRAYERS ARE JUST WORDS, NO CONSEQUENCE. ONLY BLOOD HAS CONSEQUENCE, AND YOU HAVE OFFERED THUS.
I WILL GRANT YOU YOUR CURSE. BUT FIRST, THE PRICE.
PRICE? BUT I...
WORRY NOT, JARL NJAL. THEY DO NOT ASK IT OF YOU.
THE DAUGHTERS OF BABA SALMEI WILL NOW BE ONE WITH US.


AAH!
MMNNFF!
NOW, WE ARE ONE.
AAAH!!!
YEARGH!
AGH! WHAT IS THIS TERRIBLE PAIN?!
"IN ORDER FOR THE BODY TO HOST THE POWER OF THE GREAT WOLF, THE BODY MUST CHANGE. WITH CHANGE COMES PAIN."
I CAN ATTEST TO THIS PAIN WHEN THEY EXTENDED MY LIFE TO BE THEIR HARBINGER.
LAST DAUGHTER OF BABA SALMEI, COME CLOSER. LET US BE ONE.


HUH?!
COME WITH ME.
RONJA?! NO!
I SEE YOU, LITTLE VOLVA.
PLEASE, MAMA. WE HAVE TO GO NOW!
"BE ONE WITH US."
NO!
RHOARG!


NOW, ARCHER! TAKE AWAY THE SOURCE OF THIS HEATHEN MAGIC.
ARGH!
GRAAAH!
AH!
WHOOSH!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
WHERE ARE WE GOING, RONJA?
FARAWAY.
RONJA, STOP.
BUT MAMA...


AH!
WHY, MAMA?
AH!
WHY?!
JOIN US. BE ONE WITH US.
MAMA, PLEASE!
THAT WAS FOOLISH. YOU'VE STAYED TOO LONG AND CAUGHT THEIR GAZE.
MAMA!

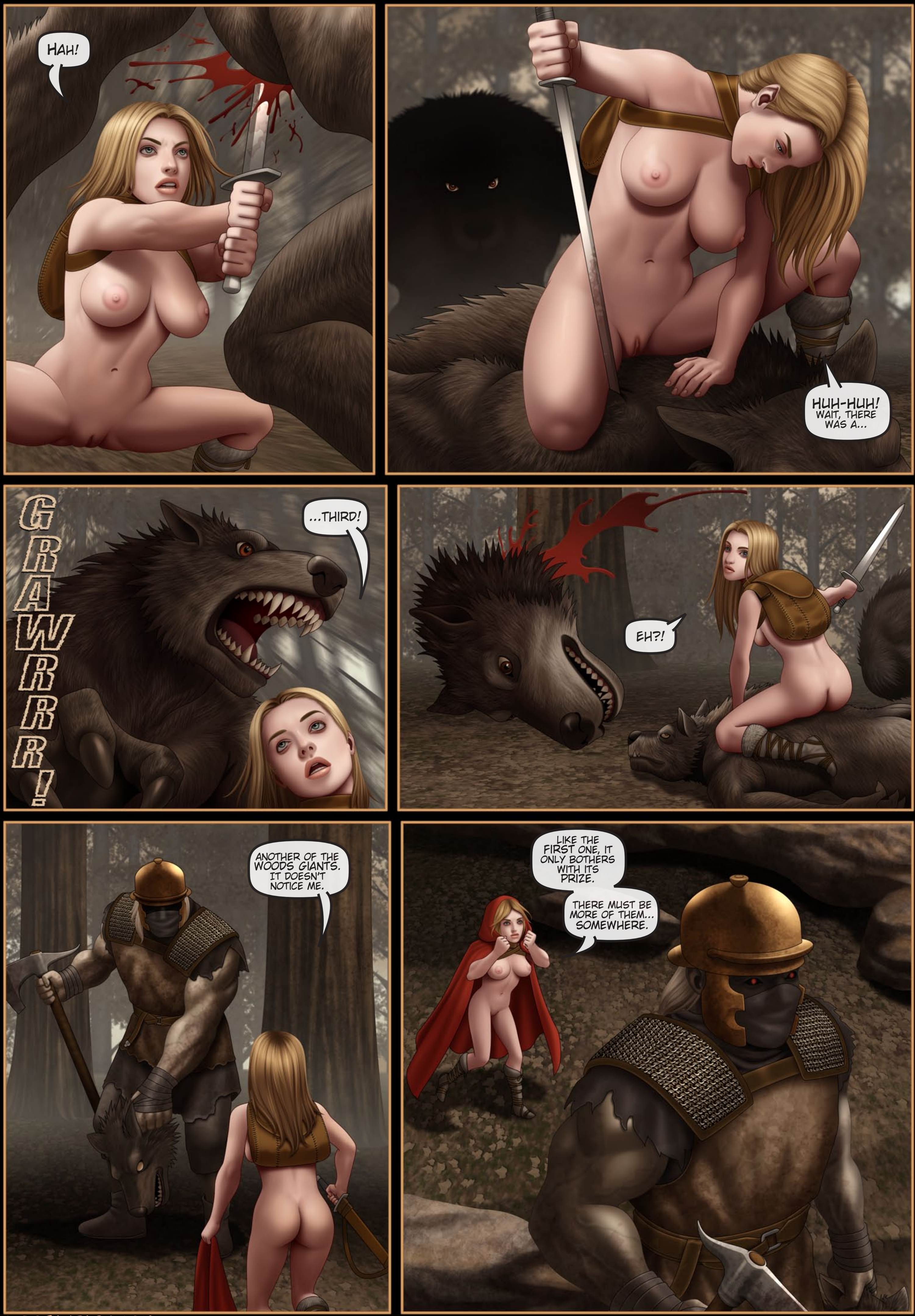


YOU CAN DO NOTHING. HERE, YOU'RE SMALL AND WEAK. BUT IN THE WAKING WORLD, YOU ARE THE HAND OF DEATH.
NO!
NO!
NO...
HUH?!
THIS... THIS THING. EVIL!
BETTER FOR IT BE GONE. AH!
IT'S LIKE STONE. HARDER THAN STONE.


OUR FALLEN DESERVE A PROPER BURIAL. A WARRIOR'S BURIAL.
AS FOR JUDOL, LEAVE THE TRAITOR FOR THE CROWS.
TELL ME, WAS I A GOOD QUEEN?
WHA..? YES, MISTRESS.
BUT HOW WOULD YOU KNOW? YOU'VE SERVED NO OTHER.
DO YOUR TASKS QUICKLY. WASTE NO TIME WITH FORMALITIES.
WHERE WILL YOU GO, MISTRESS?
WE'RE STILL MISSING ONE OF OUR OWN.
I FULLY INTEND TO REACQUIRE MY MAID SERVANT. SHE HAS THE HABIT OF ATTRACTING MISHAP.
I FEAR FOR THE WORLD WHENEVER SHE'S LEFT TO HER OWN DEVICE.


WOTAN, THEY'RE SO MANY... TOO MANY.
THE DEEP WARMTH COMES FROM THEM. I WON'T BE ABLE TO GET THROUGH.
"THERE'S A SCARY LARGE ONE TOO."
I CAN'T DO THIS.
SNIFF! SNIFF!
I'M SORRY, BABA. BUT WHAT YOU ASK IS BEYOND ME.


MAYBE THE ARCHER WAS...
HUH! THEY FOLLOWED ME!
GRAWRRR!
AAGH!
UNGH!
AOUCK!
RWAORRR!
HNNNH!


HAH!
HUH-HUH! WAIT, THERE WAS A...
GRAWRRR!
...THIRD!
EH?!
ANOTHER OF THE WOODS GIANTS. IT DOESN'T NOTICE ME.
LIKE THE FIRST ONE, IT ONLY BOTHERS WITH ITS PRIZE.
THERE MUST BE MORE OF THEM... SOMEWHERE.


HUH-HUH! HOW FAR IS HE GOING?
OH, IS THAT IT?
HMM... SO THIS IS WHERE THE HEADS GO. ODD, THAT THEY DON'T CHANGE BACK.
"THE GATE!"
MAYBE THEY'LL STILL NOT NOTICE ME.
BARBARIAN.
WHAT ME? I WAS ONLY...
BARBARIAN! THAT IS A CENTURION'S CLOAK.
AH! LET GO!


AGH! MY SWORD! DON'T PULL IT LIKE THAT!
YOU WILL NOT ENTER SO ARMED.
AAAW! COULD'VE JUST ASKED ME TO TAKE IT OFF.
NOW YOU WILL WAIT.
BRING OUT THE OX.
THE CROSSING.
"HELP ME!"
THAT VOICE...
HUH?!


HRRR!
HELP ME!
AH!
ACK!
GRAHRR!
AAYEEIAH!


GRAWRRRR!
AGH!
OOOH!
THAT TUNIC... A CELT'S TUNIC?!
HRRR!


WHACK!
CLUNK!
BEAST!
YOU HAD... AH!
...YOUR CHANCE. HUGH!
AND THAT WAS ONE MORE THAN I'D CARE FOR.


YOU'RE STILL AMONG THE LIVING. YOU SURPRISE ME, ASFRID.
AGH! I THINK I BROKE SOMETHING.
UNGH! I WAS TOLD THAT YOU DROWNED.
I FOUND DROWNING PARTICULARLY PAINFUL.
SO I CHANGED MY MIND.
<COUGH!> <COUGH!>
MISTRESS?
LET ME LAY DOWN FOR A WHILE. THE BEAST MAY HAVE BROKEN MORE THAN A FEW RIBS.
YES IT DID, MISTRESS.
IT BROKE FIVE, ONE OF WHICH IS PIERCING YOUR HEART.
HOW...<COUGH!> HOW COULD YOU KNOW THIS?
"YOU ARE DYING."
DYING? NO... NOT YET... I STILL...


"Oooh!"
Hnnn...!
Aah! Harder! Don't stop!
Aannnh!


THAT WAS GOOD. AGAIN!
SEIGFINNA, YOU ARE INSATIABLE.
SEIGFINNA? YES, THAT IS MY NAME. BUT YOU...
YOU'RE FAMILIAR TO ME. BAH, MIND TRICKS!
YOU THERE, JOIN IN IF YOU MUST.
EH? I KNOW YOU TOO.
"BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER. FUCK ME, FUCK ME RAW!"


THIS IS WHAT YOU DESIRE. YET YOU SEEM DISTRACTED. ARE YOU NOT ENJOYING THIS?
YES, BUT THERE IS SOMETHING...
SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT. AANNH!
PLEASURE NEEDN'T END. WE CAN HAVE THIS FOREVER.
NO! YOU'RE DEAD. YOU BOTH ARE.
I KILLED YOU AND I SAW YOUR BODY BURN.
IF WE ARE, THEN WHAT DOES THAT MAKE YOU?
PERHAPS YOU TOO ARE DEAD.
NO!

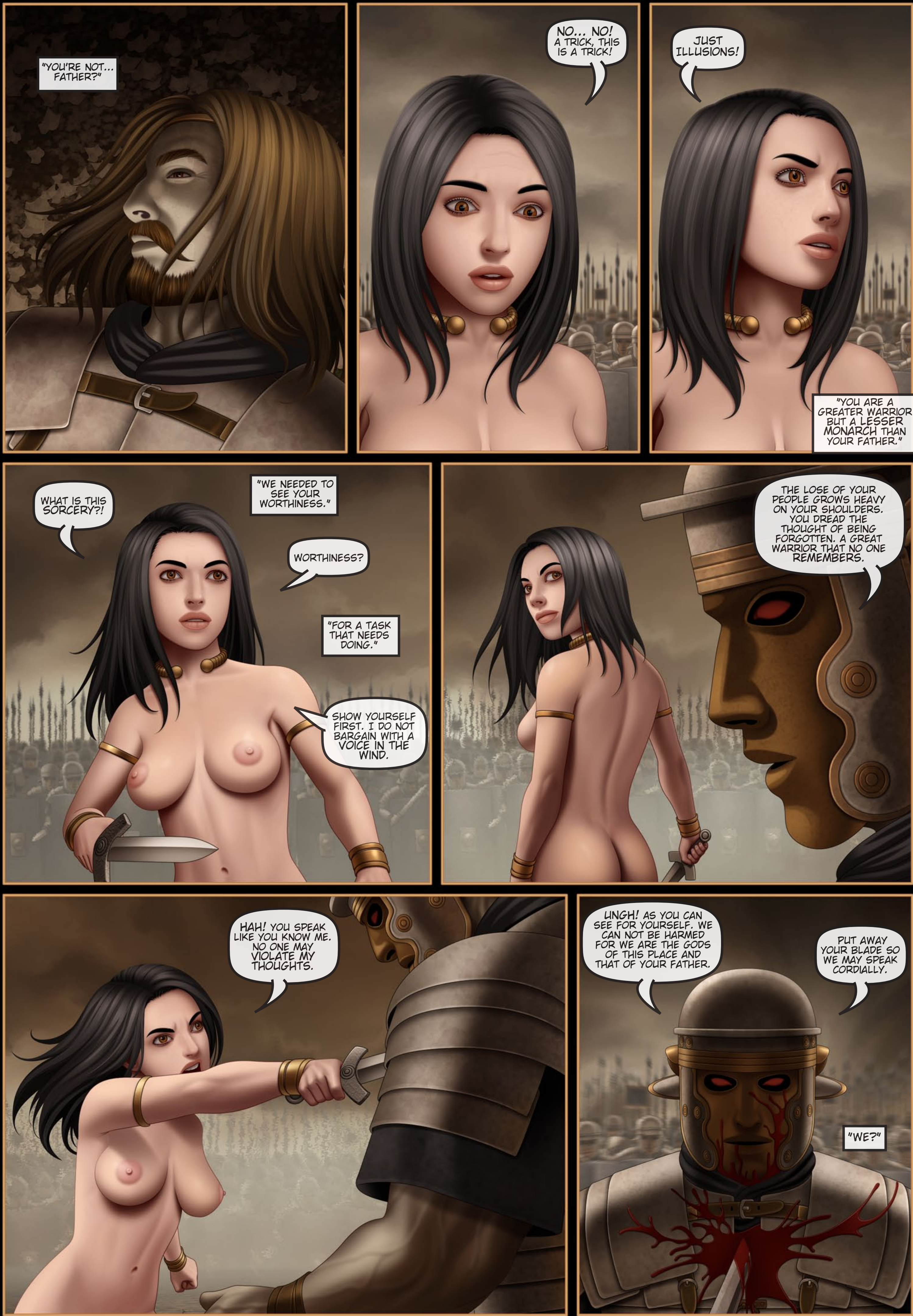

???
WAS THAT... RONJA? NO. TOO SMALL. BUT...
DON'T GO. THERE'S STILL SO MUCH MORE TO BE HAD.
IF YOU GO OUT THERE...
"YOU MAY NOT LIKE WHAT YOU FIND."
THUNK!
!!!
NO!


AAH!
THEY STOPPED? THAT SOUND FROM A DISTANCE, COMING CLOSER. LIKE THOUSANDS OF...
A WAR HORN!
A BLACK LEGION!

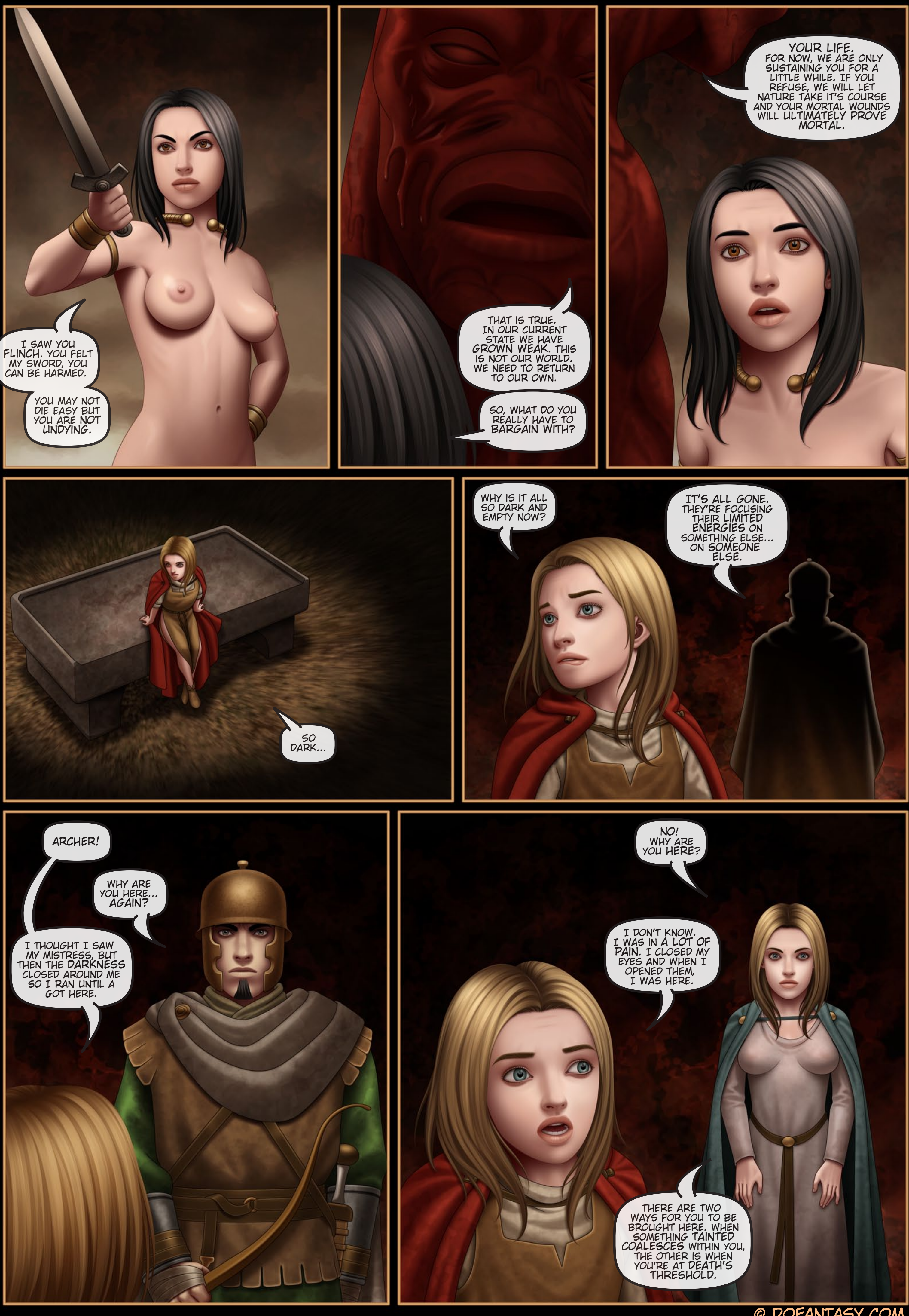

I AM SEIGFINNA OF THE CIMBRII TRIBE. ASIDE FROM THIS SWORD, I STAND NAKED.
IS THERE ONE AMONGST YOU WORTHY TO FACE ME IN SINGLE COMBAT? OR DO YOU ALL QUAIL BEHIND YOUR FORTRESS OF SHIELDS.
WHAT?! IS THAT YOUR ANSWER? A COWARDS ARROW!
COME NOW, STRIKE! WHAT SHOW OF THIS BLACK LEGION.
"IS THERE NONE WITH QUALITY IN SPIRIT AMONG THIS MULTITUDE?"
I WILL TAKE UP YOUR CHALLENGE, SEIGFINNA OF THE CIMBRII.
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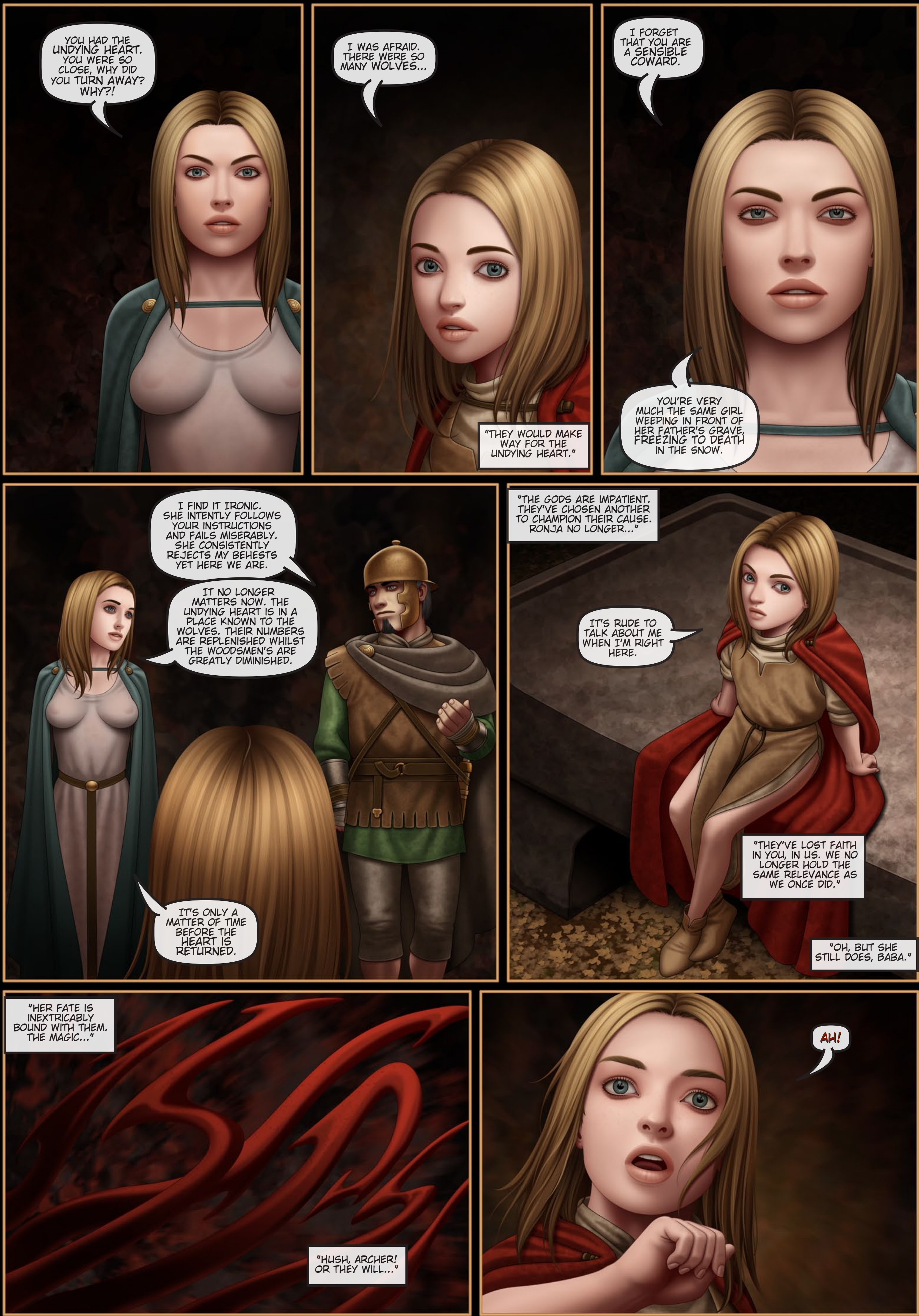

HAH! YOU ARE WEAK AND OUT MATCHED.
WE'LL SEE.
UNGH! YOU ARE QUICK DESPITE YOUR HEAVY ARMOR...
...AND SHIELD.
CLAK!
TALK LESS, FIGHT MORE.
MY SHIELD IS NOT HEAVY.
WHOMPH!
AGH!
STAND UP, FIGHT MORE!


OR WOULD YOU RATHER STAY DOWN, DIE QUICK?
I AM GRAVELY DISAPPOINTED. IS THIS IT? IS THIS ALL YOU HAD TO OFFER?
BETTER I JUST CRUSH YOU WITH MY SHIELD THAN STAIN MY SWORD.
EH!?
AAGH!
AH!
NOW STAY DOWN AND DIE QUICK!
AGH! YOU HAVE WON. YOU ARE A BETTER WARRIOR THAN YOUR FATHER.
MY FATHER?! WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW OF MY FATHER?


"YOU'RE NOT... FATHER?"
NO... NO! A TRICK, THIS IS A TRICK!
JUST ILLUSIONS!
"YOU ARE A GREATER WARRIOR BUT A LESSER MONARCH THAN YOUR FATHER."
WHAT IS THIS SORCERY?!
"WE NEEDED TO SEE YOUR WORTHINESS."
WORTHINESS?
"FOR A TASK THAT NEEDS DOING."
SHOW YOURSELF FIRST. I DO NOT BARGAIN WITH A VOICE IN THE WIND.
THE LOSE OF YOUR PEOPLE GROWS HEAVY ON YOUR SHOULDERS. YOU DREAD THE THOUGHT OF BEING FORGOTTEN. A GREAT WARRIOR THAT NO ONE REMEMBERS.
HAH! YOU SPEAK LIKE YOU KNOW ME. NO ONE MAY VIOLATE MY THOUGHTS.
UNGH! AS YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELF. WE CAN NOT BE HARMED FOR WE ARE THE GODS OF THIS PLACE AND THAT OF YOUR FATHER.
PUT AWAY YOUR BLADE SO WE MAY SPEAK CORDIALLY.
"WE?"


STRONG IS YOUR HATRED FOR THE ROMANS. FEAR THEM NOT, BUT YOU ARE ALONE. ONE AGAINST LEGIONS. IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MANY ARE LOST, THERE ARE ALWAYS MORE AND SOON TO RETURN.
IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SO. YOU CAN HAVE THE SPIRIT OF THE GREAT WOLF. POWERFUL, INVINCIBLE...
TO BE LIKE THE VILE UGLY BEASTS THAT I'VE SLAIN? I DON'T NEED THAT KIND OF POWER.
WHAT IF YOU GAIN POWER OVER THE BEASTS? YOU WILL COMMAND AN IRRESISTIBLE FORCE.
WHAT POINT IS THAT IF THEY WON'T CROSS THE RIVER? AN UNSTOPPABLE FORCE THAT DOES NOT MOVE.
FOR A GOD, YOU OFFER MUCH OF NOTHING.
BUT THIS IS WHERE THE BARGAIN RESTS. THE WEREBEASTS CAN AND WILL CROSS THE RIVER, GO TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH IF YOU WISH. BUT ONLY AFTER THE UNDYING HEART IS RETURNED TO US.
UNDYING HEART?
YES. IT'S WITHIN THE FORTRESS OF THE GIANT WOODSMEN. I BELIEVE YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED ONE BEFORE.
SO WHAT?
WEREBEASTS LACK THE MIND FOR WAR, ONLY FOR MINDLESS SLAUGHTER.
"LEAD THE WEREBEASTS IN BATTLE TO TAKE BACK THE HEART AND WHEN THIS IS DONE, THE WEREBEASTS WILL BE RELEASED TO YOU AND YOU CAN DESTROY THE ROMANS FOREVER."
YOU MAKE A TEMPTING OFFER. BUT HOW CAN I TRUST A GOD... GODS THAT LIE?

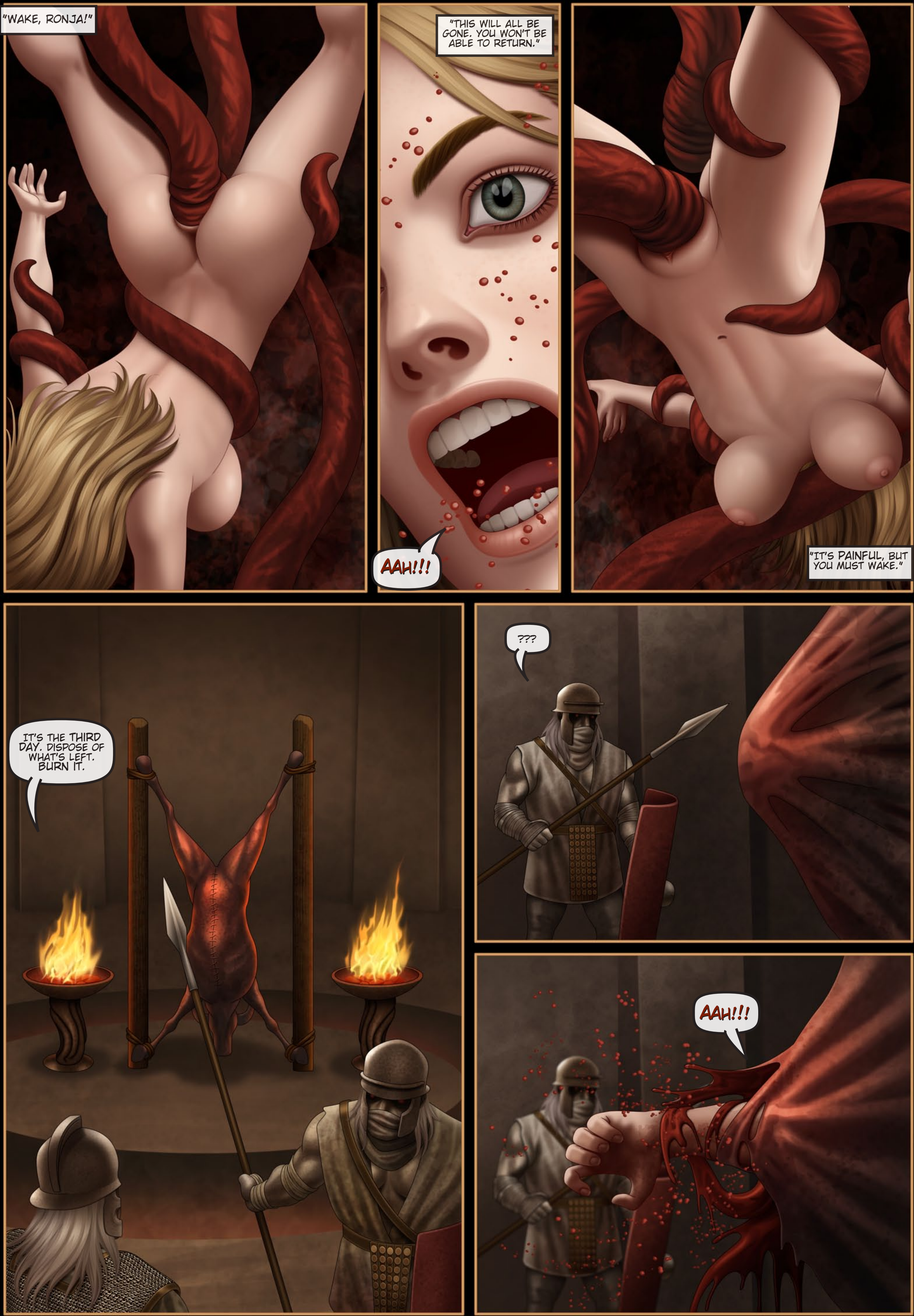

I SAW YOU FLINCH. YOU FELT MY SWORD, YOU CAN BE HARMED.
YOU MAY NOT DIE EASY BUT YOU ARE NOT UNDYING.
THAT IS TRUE. IN OUR CURRENT STATE WE HAVE GROWN WEAK. THIS IS NOT OUR WORLD. WE NEED TO RETURN TO OUR OWN.
SO, WHAT DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO BARGAIN WITH?
YOUR LIFE. FOR NOW, WE ARE ONLY SUSTAINING YOU FOR A LITTLE WHILE. IF YOU REFUSE, WE WILL LET NATURE TAKE IT'S COURSE AND YOUR MORTAL WOUNDS WILL ULTIMATELY PROVE MORTAL.
SO DARK...
WHY IS IT ALL SO DARK AND EMPTY NOW?
IT'S ALL GONE. THEY'RE FOCUSING THEIR LIMITED ENERGIES ON SOMETHING ELSE... ON SOMEONE ELSE.
ARCHER!
WHY ARE YOU HERE... AGAIN?
I THOUGHT I SAW MY MISTRESS, BUT THEN THE DARKNESS CLOSED AROUND ME SO I RAN UNTIL A GOT HERE.
NO! WHY ARE YOU HERE?
I DON'T KNOW. I WAS IN A LOT OF PAIN. I CLOSED MY EYES AND WHEN I OPENED THEM, I WAS HERE.
THERE ARE TWO WAYS FOR YOU TO BE BROUGHT HERE. WHEN SOMETHING TAINTED COALESCES WITHIN YOU, THE OTHER IS WHEN YOU'RE AT DEATH'S THRESHOLD.

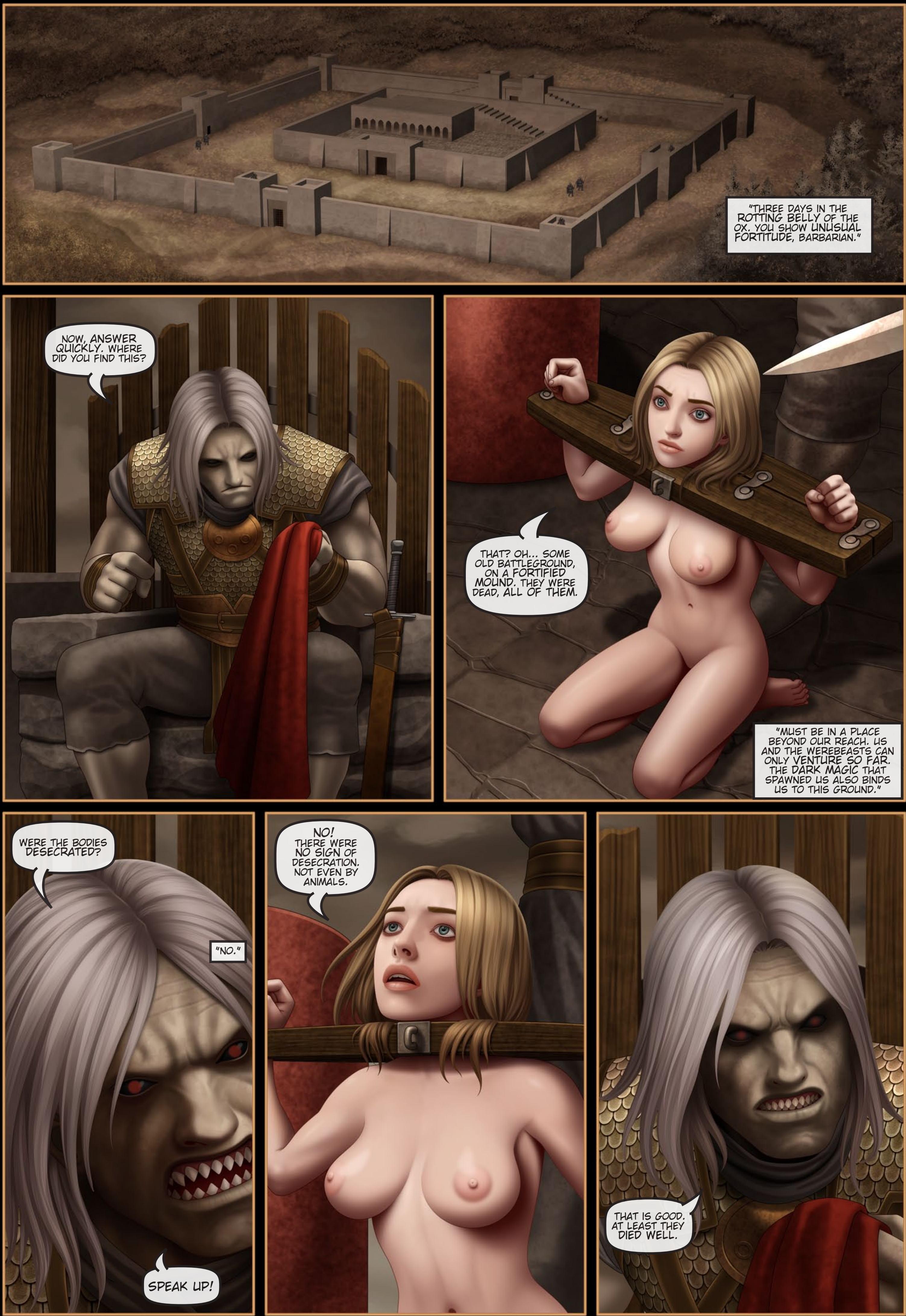


YOU HAD THE UNDYING HEART. YOU WERE SO CLOSE, WHY DID YOU TURN AWAY? WHY?!
I WAS AFRAID. THERE WERE SO MANY WOLVES...
"THEY WOULD MAKE WAY FOR THE UNDYING HEART."
I FORGET THAT YOU ARE A SENSIBLE COWARD.
YOU'RE VERY MUCH THE SAME GIRL WEEPING IN FRONT OF HER FATHER'S GRAVE, FREEZING TO DEATH IN THE SNOW.
I FIND IT IRONIC. SHE INTENTLY FOLLOWS YOUR INSTRUCTIONS AND FAILS MISERABLY. SHE CONSISTENTLY REJECTS MY BEHESTS YET HERE WE ARE.
IT NO LONGER MATTERS NOW. THE UNDYING HEART IS IN A PLACE KNOWN TO THE WOLVES. THEIR NUMBERS ARE REPLENISHED WHILST THE WOODSMEN'S ARE GREATLY DIMINISHED.
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE HEART IS RETURNED.
"THE GODS ARE IMPATIENT. THEY'VE CHOSEN ANOTHER TO CHAMPION THEIR CAUSE. RONJA NO LONGER..."
IT'S RUDE TO TALK ABOUT ME WHEN I'M RIGHT HERE.
"THEY'VE LOST FAITH IN YOU, IN US. WE NO LONGER HOLD THE SAME RELEVANCE AS WE ONCE DID."
"OH, BUT SHE STILL DOES, BABA."
"HER FATE IS INEXTRICABLY BOUND WITH THEM. THE MAGIC..."
"HUSH, ARCHER! OR THEY WILL..."
AH!

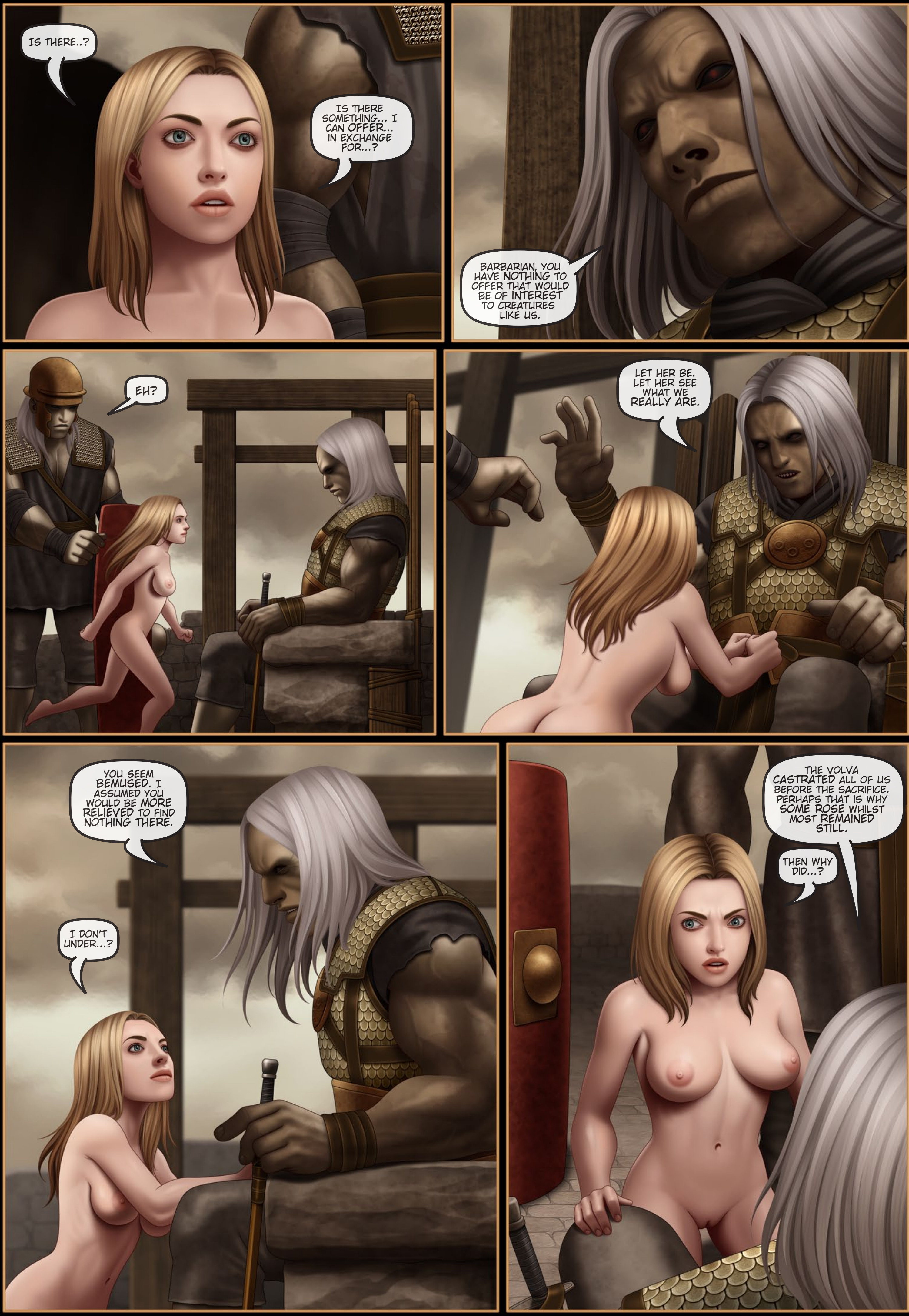

TOO LATE. THEY'RE HERE!
ARCHER, BABA! WHAT'S HAPPENING?!
GODS, NO! NOT NOW, NOT YET!
ARGH! THEY'RE ANGRY.
ARE YOU...?
IT APPEARS THAT THE GODS WILL NO LONGER TOLERATE MY INTERFERENCE. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, CHILD.
I CAN NOT BE KILLED THIS WAY, BUT IT WILL RESTRAIN ME.
"BABA SALMEI ON THE OTHER HAND..."
"FOR HER SERVICE, IMMORTALITY WAS HER REWARD. NOW, THEY'RE TAKING IT BACK, THEY'RE TAKING EVERYTHING BACK."
"IN THEIR WEAKENED STATE, THEY'RE MUSTERING ALL THEIR POWER. EVEN FROM THEIR FOLLOWERS."


I NEED MORE TIME! GODS, PLEASE GIVE ME MORE TIME.
"A LONG TIME AGO, SALMEI WAS HERSELF A SACRIFICE. MORE OUT OF CRUELTY THAN PITY, THE GODS SPARED HER IN ORDER TO SERVE THEM FOR ALL ETERNITY."
"AS YOU KNOW, SERVICE TO THESE GODS IS A HEAVY BURDEN. FOR THEY ARE DEVOURERS, EATERS OF LIFE. WHATEVER GIFTS THEY BESTOW, THEY IN TURN REAP A HUNDRED FOLD. EVENTUALLY, SHE SOUGHT RELEASE."
"SHE WANTED TO BEAR A CHILD TO SUCCEED HER. UNFORTUNATELY; DESPITE HER APPARENT IMMORTALITY, TIME HAD MADE HER BARREN."
"SO THE GODS GAVE HER THREE CHILDREN, THEIR CHILDREN. THEY WOULD TASTE OF THIS WORLD, LIVE OF IT, CONSUME OF IT AND ONE DAY RETURN TO THEM IN GREAT BLOODLETTING."
PLEASE NO!
"BUT SOMETHING UNEXPECTED HAPPENED. ONE MAY CALL IT A MIRACLE."
"FREJDIS, THE YOUNGEST BORE FRUIT."
MMNNFF!
"LITTLE RONJA, DO YOU KNOW WHAT MAKES A SUMMONING INCOMPLETE? WHEN YOU SUMMON SOMETHING, YOU HAVE TO SEND IT BACK. IT NEEDS TO BE SENT BACK. IT NEEDS YOU FOR THAT TO HAPPEN."
"I WANTED VERY MUCH TO DELAY THE INEVITABLE. BUT AS MUCH AS I TRY, I CAN PERCEIVE NO OUTCOME IN WHICH YOU WILL..."


"WAKE, RONJA!"
"THIS WILL ALL BE GONE. YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO RETURN."
AAH!!!
"IT'S PAINFUL, BUT YOU MUST WAKE."
IT'S THE THIRD DAY. DISPOSE OF WHAT'S LEFT. BURN IT.
???
AAH!!!


"THREE DAYS IN THE ROTTING BELLY OF THE OX. YOU SHOW UNUSUAL FORTITUDE, BARBARIAN."
NOW, ANSWER QUICKLY. WHERE DID YOU FIND THIS?
THAT? OH... SOME OLD BATTLEGROUND, ON A FORTIFIED MOUND. THEY WERE DEAD, ALL OF THEM.
"MUST BE IN A PLACE BEYOND OUR REACH. US AND THE WEREBEASTS CAN ONLY VENTURE SO FAR. THE DARK MAGIC THAT SPAWNED US ALSO BINDS US TO THIS GROUND."
WERE THE BODIES DESECRATED?
"NO."
SPEAK UP!
NO! THERE WERE NO SIGN OF DESECRATION. NOT EVEN BY ANIMALS.
THAT IS GOOD. AT LEAST THEY DIED WELL.


"HOLD! I SENSE NO WILLFUL DECEPTION."
WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH ME?
NOTHING. YOU ARE FREE TO GO.
WAIT I...
CLACK!
I REQUEST SANCTUARY!
SHELTER... AT LEAST FOR A LITTLE WHILE SO I CAN GATHER MY THOUGHTS.
SANCTUARY? YOU TEST YOUR FORTUNE WITH THE GODS, BARBARIAN. GO AND BE OFF, LEST THE FATES REEXAMINE THE LENGTH OF YOUR STRING.



IS THERE..?
IS THERE SOMETHING... I CAN OFFER... IN EXCHANGE FOR...?
BARBARIAN, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER THAT WOULD BE OF INTEREST TO CREATURES LIKE US.
EH?
LET HER BE. LET HER SEE WHAT WE REALLY ARE.
YOU SEEM BEMUSED. I ASSUMED YOU WOULD BE MORE RELIEVED TO FIND NOTHING THERE.
I DON'T UNDER...?
THE VOLVA CASTRATED ALL OF US BEFORE THE SACRIFICE. PERHAPS THAT IS WHY SOME ROSE WHILST MOST REMAINED STILL.
THEN WHY DID...?


THE CARNAL PLEASURES ARE BEYOND OUR GRASP.
SHEATHE YOUR SWORD. NOTHING TO GAIN FROM RECKLESS GESTURES.
UNGH!
THAT BLOOD!
"VOLVA BLOOD!"
YES, SO I'M TOLD. AND CREATURES LIKE YOU ARE PECULARLY CAPTIVATED BY IT.
ARGH! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?!

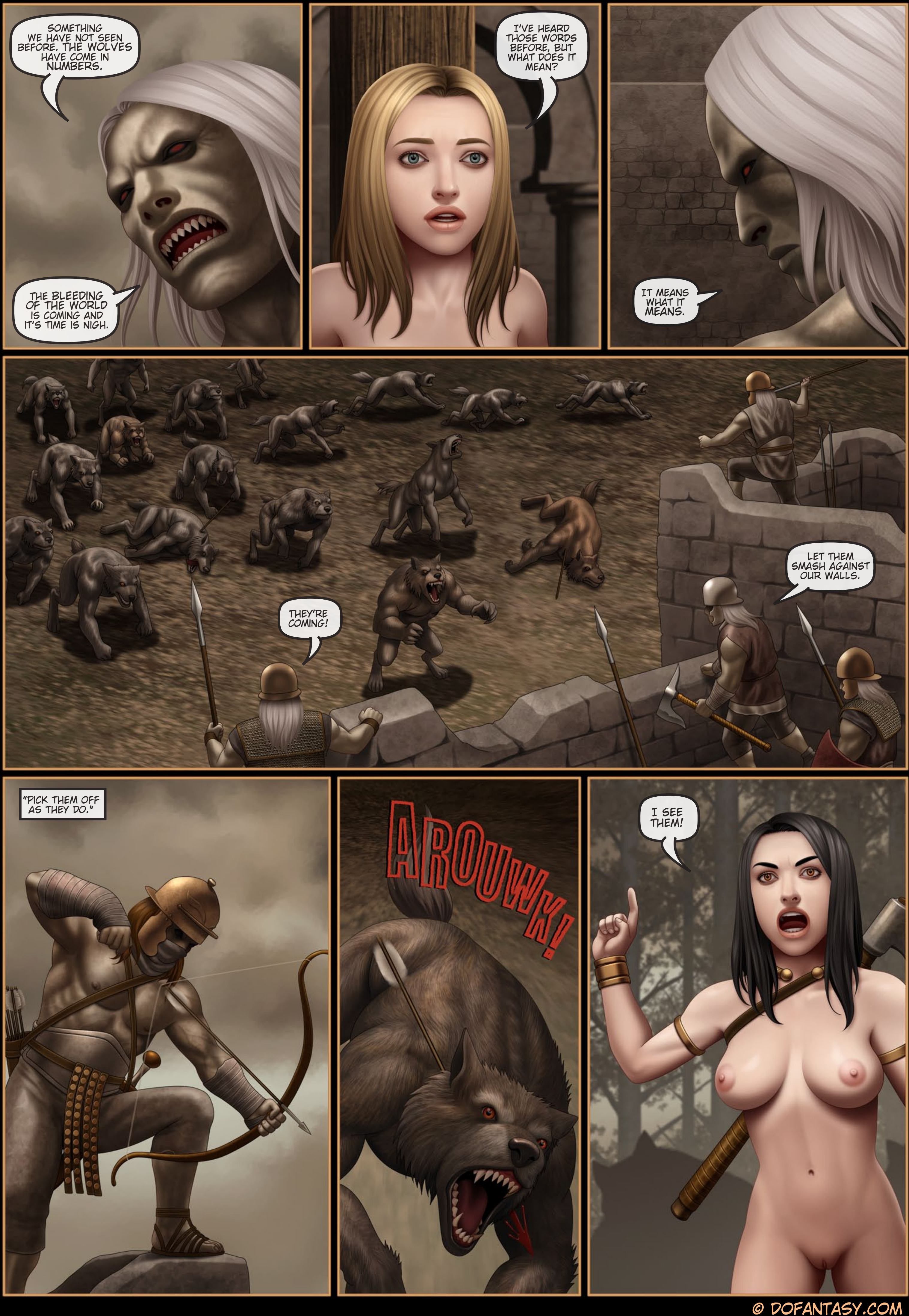

!!!
"WHY?!"
WHY HAVE YOU DONE THIS?
RAWR! WHAT IS THIS FIRE THAT COURSES THROUGH ME?
WHY WOULD YOU IGNITE THE CARNAL FIRES OF THIS BODY...
AAGH!
...WHEN YOUR OWN BODY WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO EXTINGUISH IT.
HNNNH!


THIS IS YOUR UNDOING. YOU'VE ADDED WEIGHT TO THE BURDEN OF MY CURSE.
AAGH!
RAAHR!
I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO.
BARBARIAN, YOU NEED DO BUT ONE THING.


AND THAT IS SUFFER.
THUNK!
AARGH!
THUNK!
BRUMPH!
NOW!


PLEASE, NOT LIKE THIS. YOUR BIGGER THAN...
BIGGER THAN WHAT?
GODS, NO!
YOU'VE KNOWN OUR KIND BEFORE. CURIOUS THAT YOU STILL LIVE.
AAGH!
AAAH!!!
SUFFER!
SUFFER!
STOP! I'M GOING TO BURST! I'M GOING TO BURST!


FROUUUMPH!
WOLVES!
IT'S NOT MUCH OF A FORT BUT THE WOODSMEN ARE FORMIDABLE. THIS WILL TAKE TIME.
WE DO NOT HAVE THE LUXURY OF TIME. TAKE ALL NECESSARY MEASURES TO END THIS QUICKLY.
AND REMEMBER, BRING THE UNDYING HEART TO THE ALTAR.
FOR GODS, YOU ARE A NEEDY LOT. YOU'LL LOSE MANY WOLVES THAT WAY.
"THAT IS NOT IMPORTANT."
WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS HAPPENING?

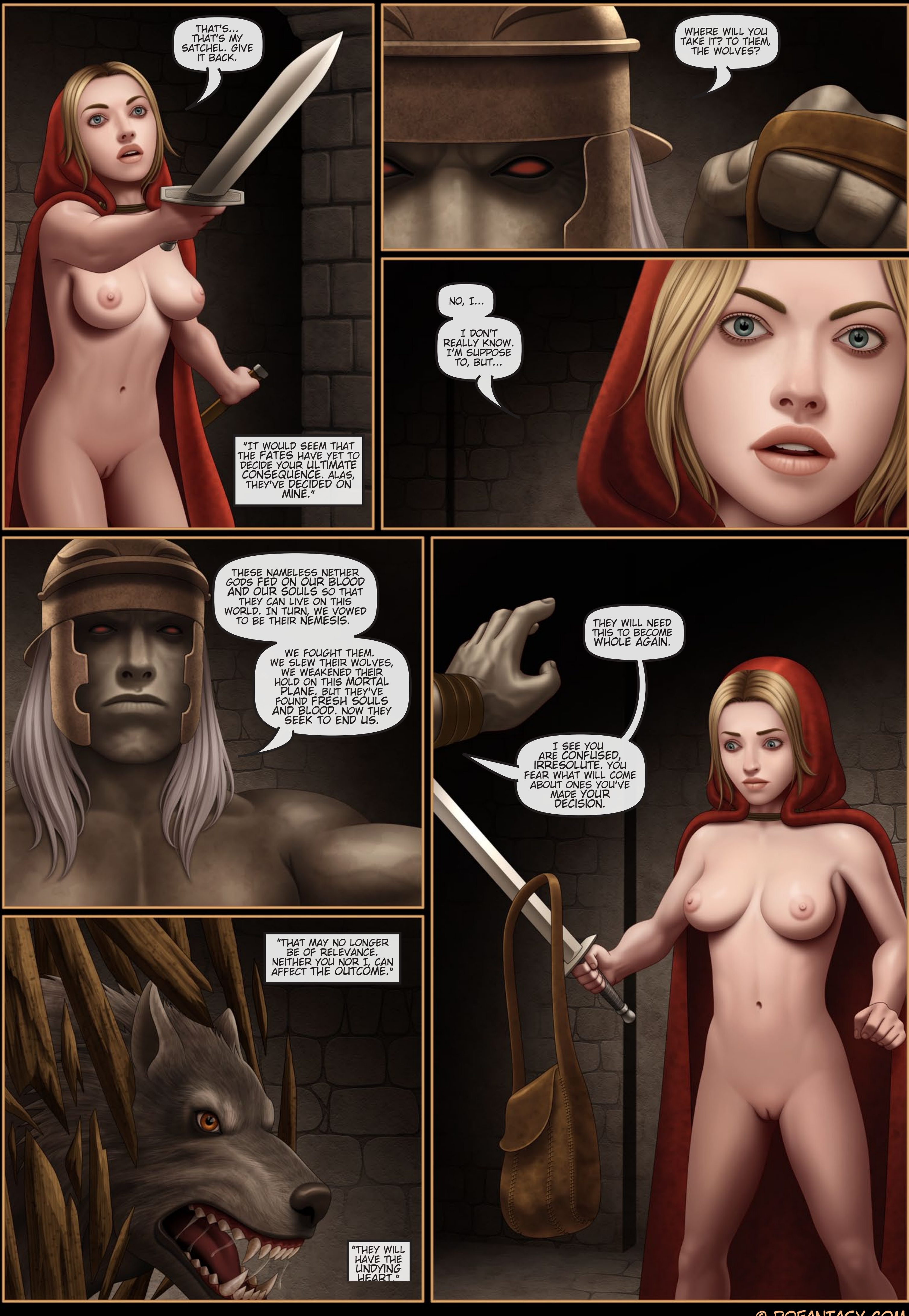

SOMETHING WE HAVE NOT SEEN BEFORE. THE WOLVES HAVE COME IN NUMBERS.
THE BLEEDING OF THE WORLD IS COMING AND IT'S TIME IS NIGH.
I'VE HEARD THOSE WORDS BEFORE, BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
IT MEANS WHAT IT MEANS.
THEY'RE COMING!
LET THEM SMASH AGAINST OUR WALLS.
"PICK THEM OFF AS THEY DO."
AROUWK!
I SEE THEM!


"LET LOSE!"
AAH!
UNGH!
WOLVES, RALLY TO ME.
THEY ARE STRONG AND CUNNING WHILE WITHIN THEIR WALLS. BUT THAT WILL CHANGE. NJAL, TAKE ME CLOSE.
AND DON'T GIVE ME THAT LOOK.
GHRRR!


HAH! TAKE THE RAMPARTS!
"FEAR NOT THEIR RUINOUS WALLS!"
"FEAR NOT THEIR WEAPONS OF STEEL!"
"RIP THEM TO SHRED!"
"THEY ARE NOTHING BUT THICKETS AGAINST OUR STORM OF TEETH AND CLAWS."
HRRRRR!
"FEAR THE RAGE OF YOUR BLOOD RED GODS!"


"FEAR THEIR BLOODY WRATH!"
BUT ABOVE ALL ELSE, FEAR MY WRATH!
WE HAVE THE WALLS!
THEIR PULLING BACK! HUNT THEM DOWN AND FIND ME THAT UNDYING HEART!
HMM... UNH? THE SATCHEL.
WHERE'S THE SATCHEL?
WHERE DID THEY TAKE THE SATCHEL?


WHERE TO GO? WHERE TO GO? THERE!
UNGH!
RIPP!
BARELY MADE IT. BUT WHERE DOES THIS GO?
A BIRD OF METAL?
"THE EAGLE, STANDARD OF THE LEGIONS OF ROME. THE STANDARD THAT WOULD UNITE THE WORLD INTO ONE GLORIOUS ETERNAL EMPIRE."
THE STANDARD THAT BRINGS RUIN TO ALL THAT GAZE UPON IT. YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THIS?



THAT'S... THAT'S MY SATCHEL. GIVE IT BACK.
"IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE FATES HAVE YET TO DECIDE YOUR ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCE. ALAS, THEY'VE DECIDED ON MINE."
WHERE WILL YOU TAKE IT? TO THEM, THE WOLVES?
NO, I...
I DON'T REALLY KNOW. I'M SUPPOSE TO, BUT...
THESE NAMELESS NETHER GODS FED ON OUR BLOOD AND OUR SOULS SO THAT THEY CAN LIVE ON THIS WORLD. IN TURN, WE VOWED TO BE THEIR NEMESIS.
WE FOUGHT THEM. WE SLEW THEIR WOLVES, WE WEAKENED THEIR HOLD ON THIS MORTAL PLANE. BUT THEY'VE FOUND FRESH SOULS AND BLOOD. NOW THEY SEEK TO END US.
THEY WILL NEED THIS TO BECOME WHOLE AGAIN.
I SEE YOU ARE CONFUSED, IRRESOLUTE. YOU FEAR WHAT WILL COME ABOUT ONES YOU'VE MADE YOUR DECISION.
"THAT MAY NO LONGER BE OF RELEVANCE. NEITHER YOU NOR I, CAN AFFECT THE OUTCOME."
"THEY WILL HAVE THE UNDYING HEART."

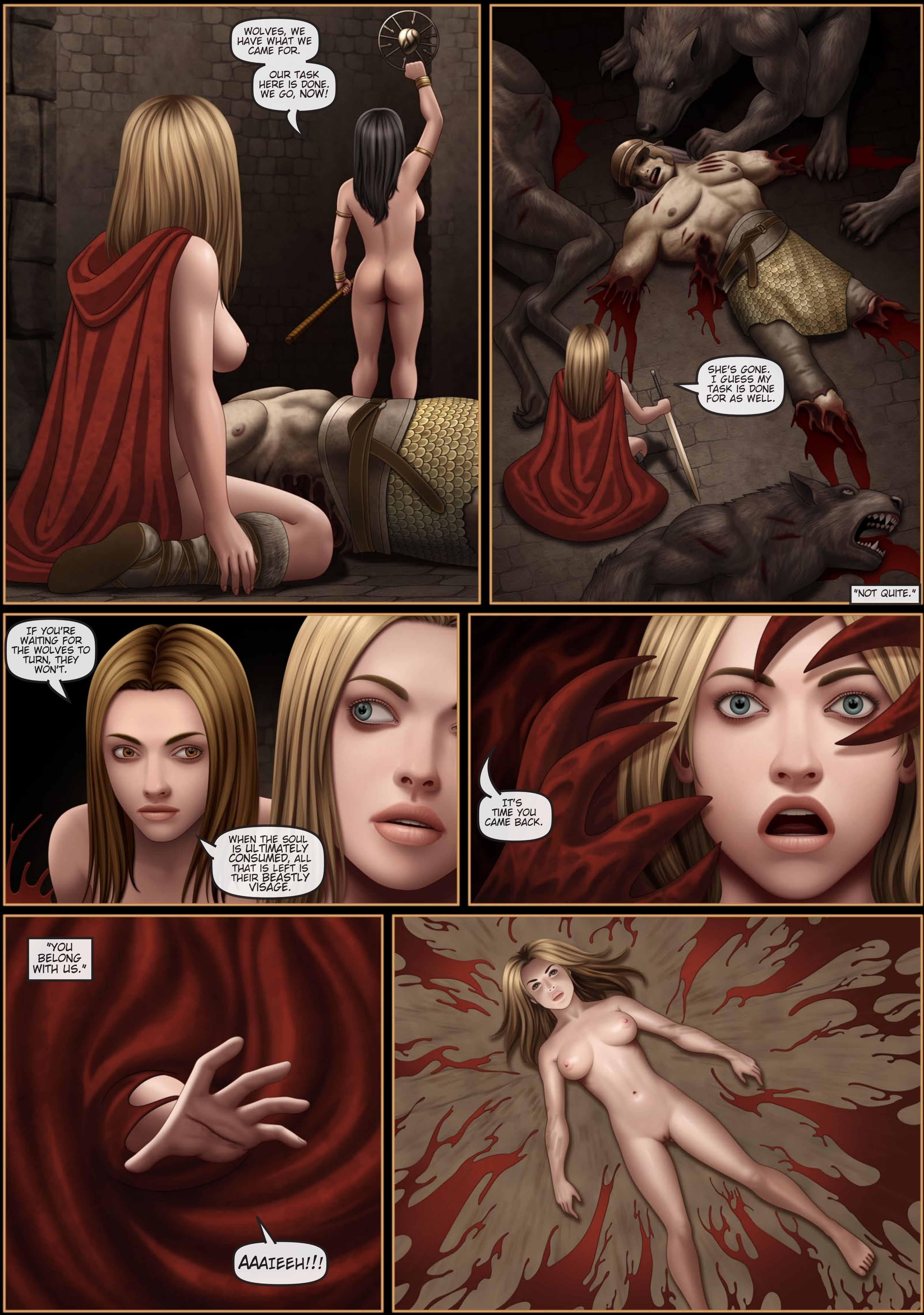

BEHIND YOU, GIRL.
HUH?
ON YOUR GUARD. LEST YOU DIE IN BLISSFUL IGNORANCE.
JUST BECAUSE THE FATES HAVE YET TO DECIDE, YOU NEEDN'T HURRY THEM ALONG.
"ABOVE!"
PRAISE TO THE GODS OF ROME WE DIE IN THEIR HONOR!
ENOUGH WITH THAT. IS THERE A WAY OUT?

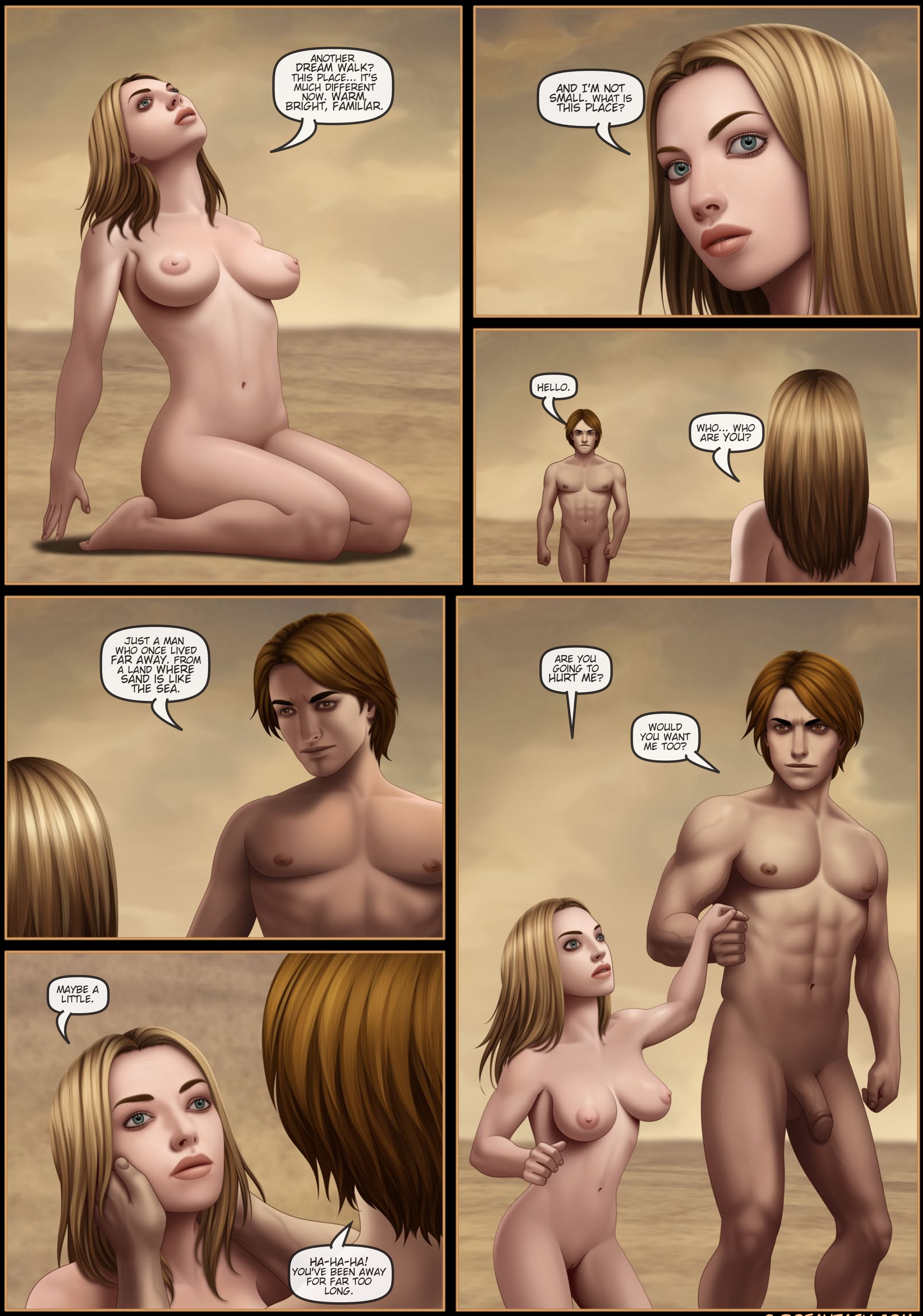

YES, THROUGH THEM!
AARGH!
RONJA?
MISTRESS?


OF ALL THE... WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
BRENNUS AND THE ROMAN ARE DEAD. THE CELTS ARE GONE. WHAT IS LEFT OF OUR PEOPLE ARE MOVING OFF TO JOIN WITH THE NORTHERN TRIBES.
"GO NOW, THEY MAY STILL BE AT THE ENCLAVE."
I WILL REJOIN YOU WHEN I FINISH WITH...
"AT YOUR FEET. IS THAT THE...?"
RONJA, HAND IT OVER.
NO. SORRY, BUT NO.
YOU'RE IN LEAGUE WITH THE BLOOD RED GODS. YOU SHOULDN'T TAKE IT TO THEM.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN, BUT I DON'T TRUST THEIR INTENTIONS. THEY ARE DEEPLY MALEVOLENT THINGS.



"SO ARE ALL GODS."
MALEVOLENT OR NOT, I HAVE A PACT WITH THEM.
PLEASE, MISTRESS. NO!
RONJA, THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR YOU TO ASSERT YOUR OPINIONS. LET GO! YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH.
EH?
AH!
GO HOME, RONJA.
IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, THEN YOU'D BEST BE FAR FROM HERE.
AW.


WOLVES, WE HAVE WHAT WE CAME FOR.
OUR TASK HERE IS DONE. WE GO, NOW!
SHE'S GONE. I GUESS MY TASK IS DONE FOR AS WELL.
"NOT QUITE."
IF YOU'RE WAITING FOR THE WOLVES TO TURN, THEY WON'T.
WHEN THE SOUL IS ULTIMATELY CONSUMED, ALL THAT IS LEFT IS THEIR BEASTLY VISAGE.
IT'S TIME YOU CAME BACK.
"YOU BELONG WITH US."
AAAIEEH!!!


ANOTHER DREAM WALK? THIS PLACE... IT'S MUCH DIFFERENT NOW. WARM, BRIGHT, FAMILIAR.
AND I'M NOT SMALL. WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
HELLO.
WHO... WHO ARE YOU?
JUST A MAN WHO ONCE LIVED FAR AWAY. FROM A LAND WHERE SAND IS LIKE THE SEA.
MAYBE A LITTLE.
HA-HA-HA! YOU'VE BEEN AWAY FOR FAR TOO LONG.
ARE YOU GOING TO HURT ME?
WOULD YOU WANT ME TOO?


THIS MUST BE THE PLACE. NJAL, STAY.
DREARY LOOKING FOR AN ALTAR. NO DOUBT THIS PLACE HAVE SEEN MUCH BLOODSHED.
I HAVE YOUR UNDYING HEART. I WOULD'VE BEEN HERE SOONER HAD YOU GIVEN ME PROPER DIRECTIONS.
NOW YOU'RE ALL QUIET. RED GODS, WE HAD A PACT.
MORTALITY DOESN'T AFFORD ME THE LUXURY OF TIME. COME FORTH OR YOU WILL NEVER SEE ME OR THIS THING AGAIN.


QUICKLY NOW.
WAIT. I HAVE QUESTIONS.
THAT CAN WAIT. SOON YOU WILL FIND ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS YOU'VE YET TO ASK.
EH...?
EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS IS SO FAMILIAR, SO NATURAL. I THINK I KNOW YOU. DO YOU KNOW OF AN ARCHER?
FORGET ABOUT HIM. FORGET ABOUT THE SPIRITS OF THAT REALM. THEY ONLY SERVE TO TRICK AND CONFUSE YOU.
WE BELONG TOGETHER. WITHOUT EACH OTHER, WE ARE NOTHING BUT SHATTERED FRAGMENTS.


DISCARD THIS FALSE SKIN.
WHAT?!
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
DISCARD THE FLESH FROM THIS DYING REALM.
REJOIN US. BE WHOLE ONCE MORE.
NO!
"BE THE HAND OF DEATH, BLEED THIS WORLD OF IT'S FLAWED CREATIONS."


TIME IS UP, RED GODS. YOU CAN KEEP YOUR WOLVES. I CAN FIGHT MY BATTLES WITHOUT THEM.
WAIT, SEIGFINNA OF THE CIMBRII.
THE GODS ARE CURRENTLY PREOCCUPIED.
I THOUGHT GODS WERE OMNIPOTENT. WHAT COULD POSSIBLY PREOCCUPY THEM?
IT'S NOT YOUR PLACE TO SCRUTINIZE THE AFFAIRS OF GODS. NOW GIVE THAT TO ME.
THE WOLVES ARE YOURS. THEY CAN NOW CROSS BEYOND THE RIVER.
ASFRID, YOU WERE AN OBNOXIOUS LITTLE BITCH BEFORE. YOU'RE EVEN MORE SO NOW.
I COULD BE MORE GRATEFUL IF THEIR NUMBERS WEREN'T SO DECIMATED.
BUT UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, I'LL TAKE WHAT I CAN... GET?
ASFRID, WHY IS THIS SWORD HERE? THIS IS RONJA'S.
SEIGFINNA OF THE CIMBRII, JUST TAKE YOUR WOLVES AND GO.


WOTAN! WHAT IS THIS, ASFRID? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
ASFRID? OH, I FORGET THAT I'M WEARING HER SKIN. ASFRID DIED IN THE RIVER NOT TOO LONG AGO. SAD LITTLE CREATURE, SORT OF RESENTED YOUR FAVORITISM OF RONJA.
WE HAVE SUFFERED LONG ENOUGH IN THIS IMPERFECT WORLD. WE WILL REEK ABSOLUTE VENGEANCE ON THIS REALM OF FLAWED CREATIONS.
GO WHILE YOU STILL CAN. FORGET THIS GIRL, SHE IS WITH US NOW.
SOON WE WILL WIPE AWAY THE SCOURGE OF MAN AND BRING PEACE TO THIS REALM.
DON'T TOUCH HER! RONJA'S MINE.


"SACRED BLOOD FROM WHICH LIFE SPRINGS."
MY FATHER GAVE HER TO ME. YOU WILL NOT HAVE HER.
THE ARROGANCE! THE IMPUDENCE! SHE WAS NEVER YOURS.
"CIMBRII QUEEN, YOU'VE SQUANDERED YOUR ONE OPPORTUNITY FOR FLIGHT."
"NOT ALL WOLVES WERE GIVEN FOR YOU TO COMMAND. THE MOST VICIOUS REMAIN OURS."
BEHOLD AND DESPAIR, SEIGFINNA OF THE CIMBRII. INEVITABLE DOOM IS NOW UPON YOU.



"THE UNDYING HEART..."
HRRRR!!!
...BEATS ONCE MORE.
YOU CALL THIS OVERSIZED FERAL DOG, MY DOOM?
"IF THERE IS ONE THING I'VE LEARNED FROM YOU GODS."
YOU TEND TO OVERSTATE THE FACTS.


HNNH!
AANH!
UUNGH!
AAH!
IT IS NOT HAPPENING. WHY IS THAT?
SHE REMAINS CONTENTIOUS.
NOT FOR LONG. SHE WILL BLEND WITH US.


"THERE IS SIMPLY NO OTHER RECOURSE."
"THIS CREATURE FRAGMENTED WILL AGAIN BE MADE WHOLE."
DOG, HOW MANY CUTS DOES IT TAKE TO BRING YOU TO HEEL?
NOT ENOUGH, I GUESS. AGH!
"THE LITTLE BIT OF OUR BLOOD ENHANCES YOUR NATURAL ABILITIES AND FORTIFIES YOU FROM IMMEDIATE HARM. BUT THIS SO CALLED DOG, IT'S VEINS RUN THROUGH OF OUR BLOOD."
"SOON ENOUGH, THE LIMITATIONS OF MORTALITY WILL TAKE IT'S COURSE."
"AND YOUR BIT OF NUISANCE WILL END."


AAH!
COME, DOG! LET'S FINISH THIS.
HAHAHAH! YOU COULDN'T SLAY IT WITH AN AXE MUCH LESS A STICK. EVEN WITH YOUR CUTS, IT GROWS STRONGER.
IT IS TIME!
WE ARE READY.
CHOMP!

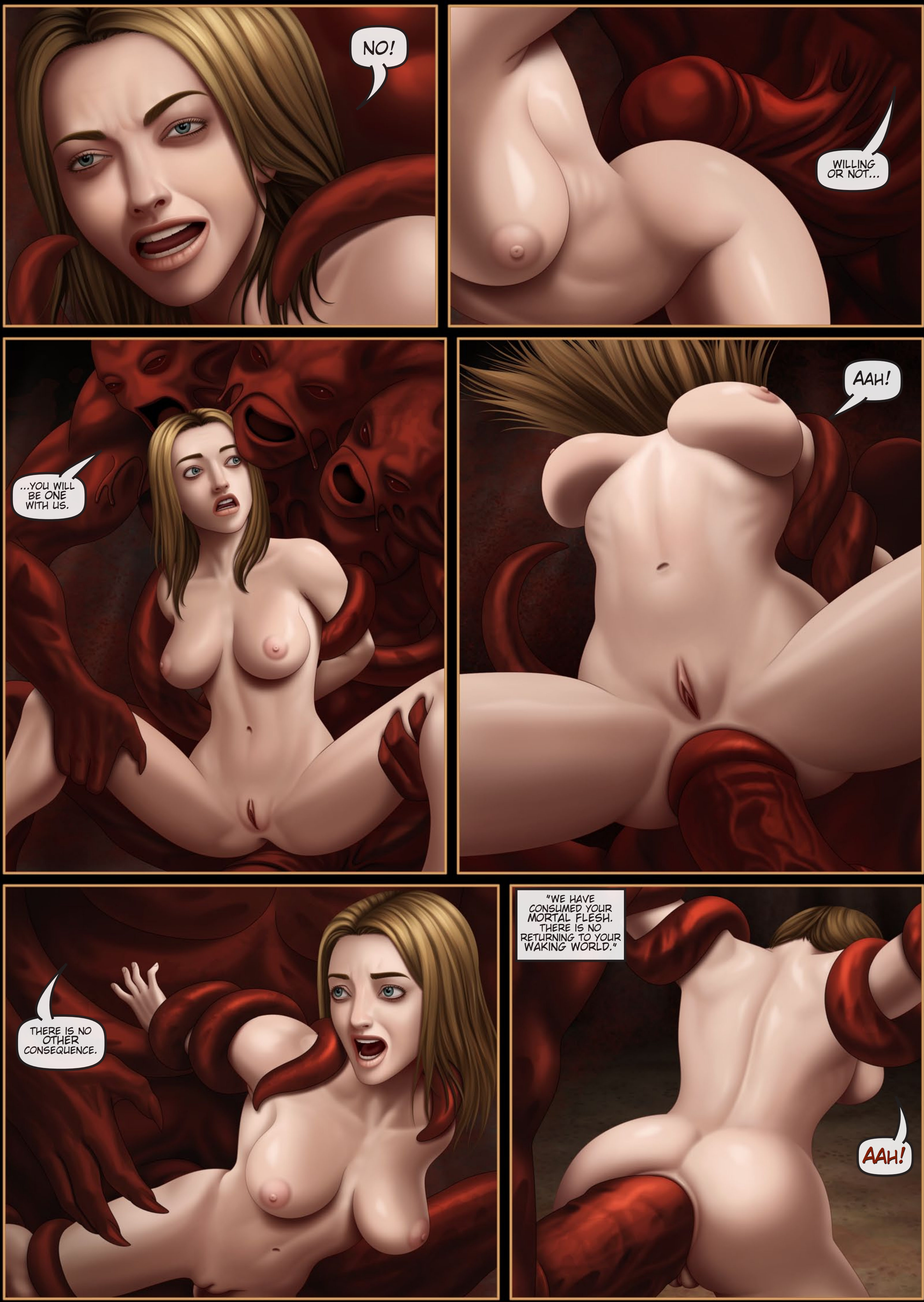

KEEP AWAY! I NOW KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS. DARK, CRUEL, HATEFUL.
WHY, LITTLE ONE? YOU HAVE NO STAKE IN THEIR WORLD. YOU HAVE NO REASON TO OPPOSE THIS.
I SEE, OF ALL THE MEANINGLESS TRAITS THAT YOU COULD ACQUIRE FROM THEIR WORLD, IT HAD TO BE EMPATHY.
"EVEN NOW, THEY WAGE WAR WITH EACH OTHER BRINGING SUFFERING AND BUTCHERY. THEY DO NOT DESERVE YOUR EMPATHY."
"WE SHALL BRING PEACE UPON THEIR REALM."
A FINAL PEACE THAT WILL PUT AN END TO THEIR SCREAMS OF PAIN AND AGONY FOREVER.
"BUT FIRST..."
AAGH!
YOU MUST RETURN TO US.



HRRR!
"DOG, WE'RE NOT DONE YET."
BAPP!
GET AWAY FROM HER. YOUR FIGHT IS WITH ME.
OUR FIGHT WAS NEVER WITH YOU, SEIGFINNA OF THE CIMBRII. JUST YOUR KIND.
NO!


NO... RONJA...
BLOOD RED GODS! I SWEAR TO YOU, WHILE I DRAW BREATH, I WILL FOREVER BE A THORN ON YOUR SIDE.
THERE WILL BE NO END TO MY WRATH.
THAT WE HIGHLY DOUBT.
AAH!
"WE WERE BORN OF THE WRATH OF MEN."
AND TODAY YOU'VE DRAWN YOUR LAST BREATH.


GRAAHR!
RHAOOUR!
I THANK YOU FOR THE WOLVES.
"THEY'RE PROVING THEIR WORTH."
UNNNH!


NO!
WILLING OR NOT...
...YOU WILL BE ONE WITH US.
AAH!
THERE IS NO OTHER CONSEQUENCE.
"WE HAVE CONSUMED YOUR MORTAL FLESH. THERE IS NO RETURNING TO YOUR WAKING WORLD."
AAH!

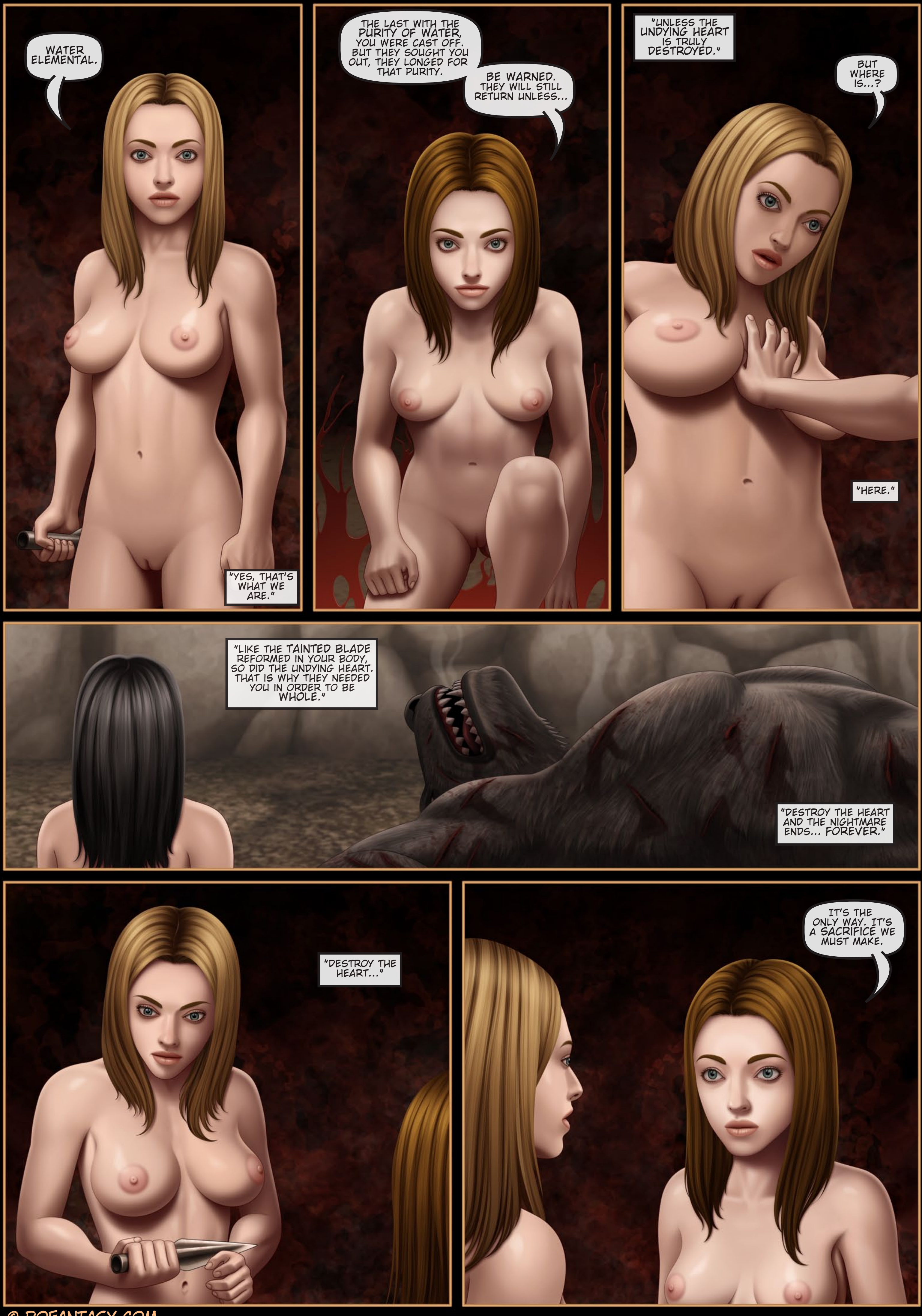

MORTAL FLESH... YOU'VE CONSUMED MY BODY?
YES! ONCE WE ARE WHOLE, THE WAKING WORLD SHALL FOLLOW.
THEN IT'S HERE.
AGH!
UNGH!



ARROUK...!
RONJA'S SWORD. WORN AND TARNISHED.
GIRL NEVER COULD TAKE CARE OF HER OWN EQUIPMENT.
GRROUR!
DOG, LET US FINISH THIS.
WILL IT BE MY END OR YOURS? FATE WILL DECIDE.
YOU SHOULD'VE LEFT ME ALONE!
GAARGH!


FINALLY, SIGNS OF WEAKNESS.
"PERHAPS YOUR DOOM IS MUCH NEARER THAN MINE, DOG."
AARGH! NO!
AAGH!
LET'S BOTH FACE THE CONSEQUENCE.
HAH!
KEEYAAH!


NOO!!!
AAGH!
AAH!
"YOU'VE DONE IT!"
HUGH?!
"YOU'VE TORN AWAY THE DARK SOULS THAT HAVE INFESTED US."
THEIR BLOOD, CURSED WITH RAGE, POLLUTED THE PURITY OF WATER.
IT STARTED WITH THE SON OF THE FIRST MEN, THEN THE OTHERS FOLLOWED. DROWNED AND BLINDED WITH THEIR HATE, WE LOST OUR WAY. FORGOT WHAT WE WERE.


WATER ELEMENTAL.
"YES, THAT'S WHAT WE ARE."
THE LAST WITH THE PURITY OF WATER, YOU WERE CAST OFF. BUT THEY SOUGHT YOU OUT, THEY LONGED FOR THAT PURITY.
BE WARNED. THEY WILL STILL RETURN UNLESS...
"UNLESS THE UNDYING HEART IS TRULY DESTROYED."
BUT WHERE IS...?
"HERE."
"LIKE THE TAINTED BLADE REFORMED IN YOUR BODY, SO DID THE UNDYING HEART. THAT IS WHY THEY NEEDED YOU IN ORDER TO BE WHOLE."
"DESTROY THE HEART AND THE NIGHTMARE ENDS... FOREVER."
"DESTROY THE HEART..."
IT'S THE ONLY WAY. IT'S A SACRIFICE WE MUST MAKE.


IS THERE FIGHT LEFT IN YOU, DOG?
THOUGHT NOT.
"DESTROY IT NOW, RONJA!"
DON'T RUSH ME. THIS IS NOT EASY.
I'LL HASTEN YOUR PASSING.
EH?!
RED GODS...
...I'VE HAD MY FILL OF THIS!


QUIT YOUR LINGERING AND DIE.
RETURN TO THE BLACK ABYSS THAT SPAWNED YOU!
HUH?!
AAAIEEH!!!
WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
OH, NO!
I'M SORRY, RONJA. I COULD DO NOTHING FOR YOU.
I WILL FIND GODS WORTHY OF WORSHIP AND OFFER PRAYERS FOR YOU.




THE END?




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